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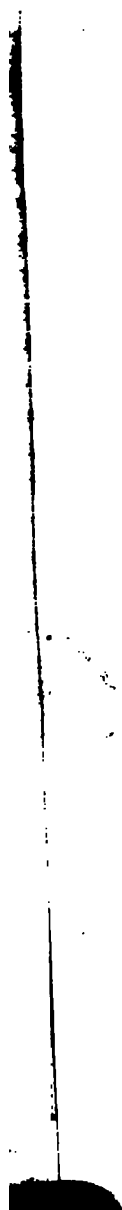
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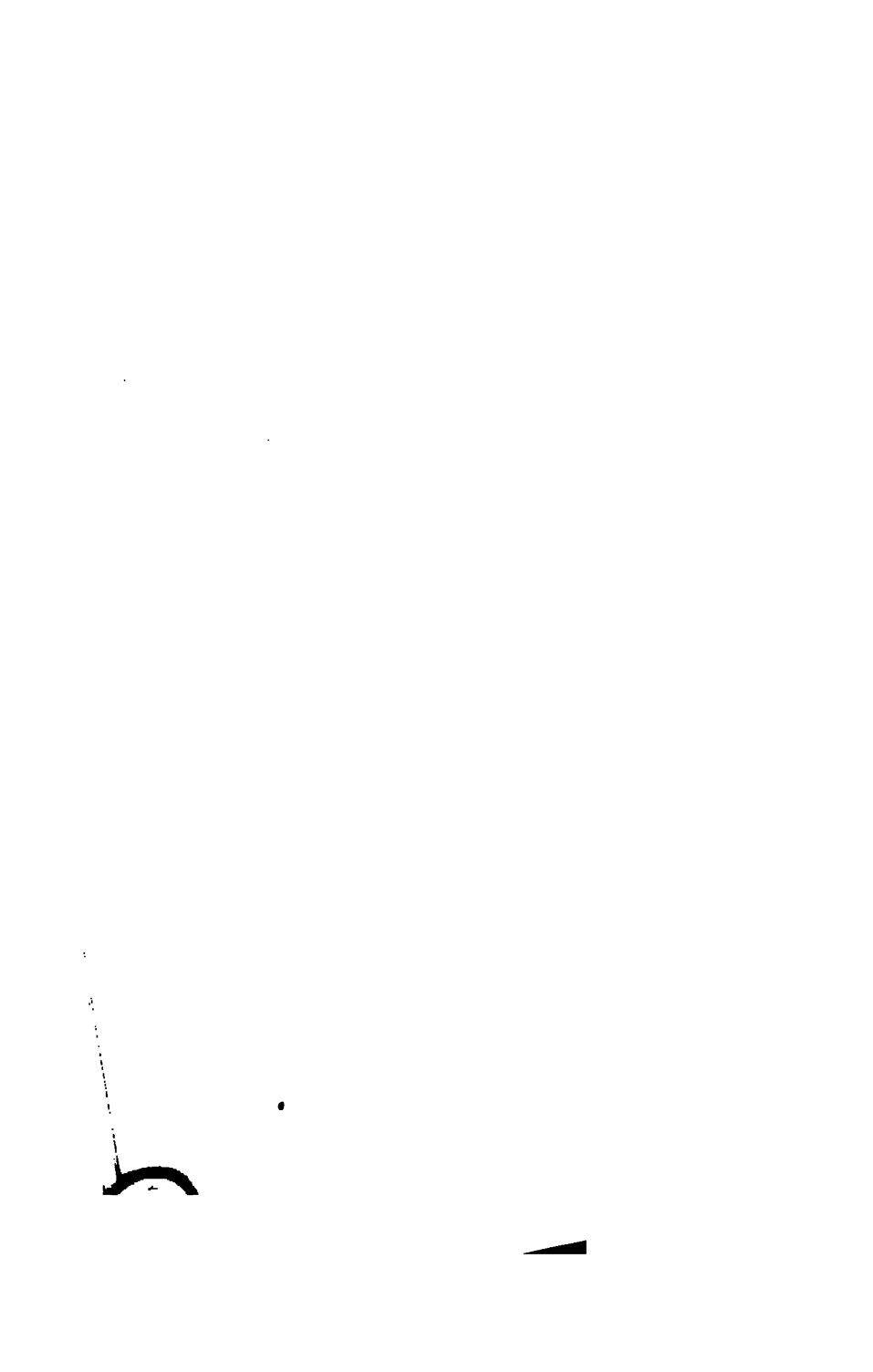






## **THE MARQUIS AND PAMELA**





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Cora sat down on the wall of the bridge

# THE MARQUIS *and* PAMELA

BY

EDWARD H. COOPER

*Author of*

*"The Monk Wins," "Resolved to be Rich,"*  
*etc.*

PICTURES BY JULIA ROPER

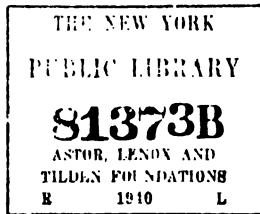


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# **THE MARQUIS AND PAMELA**



## CHAPTER I.

**A**RE we waiting for anyone? ”  
“ For the Marquis, my lady.”

“ Yes, yes, I know. But for anybody else? ”

“ No, my Lady.”

The Countess of Arlington turned away with a contented nod. Her luncheon party was going to be a success. All the guests whom she had asked in her first batch of invitations had accepted, nobody had sent subsequent excuses, and now everybody except one man was there. About that one man she felt no great anxiety. He never answered invitations; made no engagements for night or day, and went to parties or not exactly as he pleased at the last moment. Towards two o'clock in the afternoon, for instance, the Marquis of Seaford strolled out into the hall of the great family house in Belgrave Square and looked over his list of engagements for lunch. If he found one which pleased him he went to it; if not, he strolled back into his own dining-room, and the chef might either send up the most exquisite little meal in London or help himself to a month's salary and depart without further words.

But Lady Arlington had no fear whatever as to where Lord Seaford would come to-day. When

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her house was in question the rest of the engagement book at 52 Belgrave Square was not very carefully studied. She looked round the dark morning-room—dark now because the terrace outside was covered with an awning—and decided that she would give her guest another ten minutes and then begin lunch. There was always the chance, of course, that a certain terrible week last year might be repeated, when for the first time in his life the Marquis of Seaford caught a cold, and shut himself up in his house, and told all the servants to say he was dead, and gave himself up to long, solitary, savage misery. When to his own extreme astonishment he recovered, and was assured by three famous consulting physicians and two well-known operating surgeons, for whom he sent, that no permanent ill-effects need be anticipated from his late illness, he had gone to the unusual length of apologising to Lady Arlington for missing one of her dinner parties; but my Lady was quite aware that he would do the same thing again if he fell ill.

The guests, some eighteen in number, were mostly out on the terrace of the old Chelsea house, and a very considerable commotion seemed to be prevailing there. The centre of the commotion was a stone table, round which three men were standing, each with his hand on a tumbler turned downwards. Inside each tumbler was a butterfly.

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“Where’s the race?”

A tall, well-groomed, fair-haired man of three or four-and-thirty, with a generally unfinished look about his face, as if nature, even while making him in the same mould as a thousand others, had suddenly got a little bored with the business, came out on to the terrace and looked round him. “Lady Arlington says there’s a new race!” he shouted excitedly. “She always does have something new. Hullo, what’s this? A table? Tumblers, eh? Tell us about it, Carstone?”

“Don’t touch, old chap.” Young Lord Carstone waved the speaker away. “There’s a butterfly under each of these glasses. We’re going to let them loose and bet which flies over the balustrade first.”

A boy of some ten or eleven summers had followed Mr. Reginald Darcy on to the terrace, and now ran up to the table, his eyes shining joyfully. “May I throw things at yours for you, Lord Carstone? I won’t hurt it—much.”

“We may shout at the butterflies, but not touch them,” said Carstone briefly. “We ought to begin, but we must wait for Whitmore. He’s got more money on his butterfly than all of us put together. Where on earth—— Oh, here he is.”

There came slowly on to the terrace a man of six-and-twenty, with a singular atmosphere of excess about him. He was dressed to the point

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of excess which is known as foppishness; he was handsome in a curiously exaggerated way, his regular features, bright eyes, olive complexion and brown wavy hair giving one a curious impression of an actor made up to look the part of handsome youth; when he was pleased, he looked too pleased, leaving a similar impression of politely-acted pleasure; and throughout his talk ran a faint sense of endless straining after effect which made it very tiresome to the ordinary man. But even his acting was excessively clever, and he had a discrimination amounting to an instinct as to the company in which it was and was not safe to show off. The first and most abiding sensation, in fact, of anybody approaching the Earl of Whitmore on matters of business or pleasure, was that from top to toe he was unreal.

He walked up to the table now and put a hand on the remaining tumbler: "Any more betting?" he asked with a polite glance round the terrace; and then it became obvious that in addition to other socially agreeable qualities Lord Whitmore possessed a very charming voice.

"I lay you three fivers to one," said Darcy, "against your butterfly. You haven't given it any air for at least five minutes."

Lord Whitmore produced his betting book and smiled graciously at the last speaker: "Mr. Darcy, fifteen pounds to five pounds against yel-

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low and white streaks being first over the balustrade. You are going to be judge, Adeane, aren't you?"

A man who might have been twin brother to Carstone, and to about four others of the young men present, rose from a stone bench where he was sitting languidly—languor was the only approach to an emotion which these persons ever displayed in public—and with a brief nod sauntered down towards the balustrade. The river lay beyond it; June sunshine flashed up and down the running, rippling water, and lit up the hideous wharves and factories and storehouses of the Surrey shore with such a brilliant light that their ugliness was lost in the light. But so far as Mr. Adeane's brain kept any definite ideas at all, which was not very far, he shared the general impression that London was always and everywhere hideous. Therefore in no case would he have looked long at the Chelsea River. Also at this particular moment Pamela Carstone came on to the terrace.

Feminine beauty by itself is a very much over-rated factor in the making of permanent history. Joined to the placid stupidity with which it is so often associated, it has, I believe, very little effect on mankind after a first brief acquaintance, except a decided desire to look at it only from a distance. Pamela Carstone, however, sister of Lord Carstone, and granddaughter, and joint heiress with her brother, of the Lady Car-



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stone who is now sitting on the terrace, was a person so radiantly lovely that her possession of gaiety, wit, and intelligence seemed an absurd piece of good-natured indulgence on the part of Providence. And her dowry of one hundred thousand pounds seemed further a sheer outrage on the hapless young women who had to compete with her in the matrimonial world.

Miss Carstone's arrival seemed to be what everyone was waiting for; as she came forward now a few more bets were exchanged, and then the four men at the table raised their tumblers and released the butterflies. One of the latter fell to the ground; it was Lord Carstone's, and the young man fell on one knee beside it crying out: "Comfound my brute! It's lazy, or dead, or got a headache, or something! Get up, you fool of a butterfly! Jump! Fly for it!" Then, imploringly: "Be a sportsman, and fly!"

Another butterfly was pursued with equally emphatic prayers by a youth who bore no mark on his face which could have conceivably distinguished him from Darcy, Carstone, or Adeane; but who had trousers of a bluer grey, and a grey tie, and was perhaps a shade more admirably dressed. The youth in question, Mr. Jack Hamilton, was not now, however, looking his best; he was scarlet in the face with rage and indignation, for his butterfly, though strong on the wing and very much alive, was flying straight away from the balustrade and making for a con-

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servatory at the other end of the terrace. "Not that way!" shrieked poor Jack. "The race isn't to the conservatory! Shoo! The other way, you imbecile creature! Oh, I say, it's gone right in and settled on that orchid." Mr. Hamilton took up a stick and looked round ferociously: "Would it be unfair to smash the orchid with this stick if I didn't touch the butterfly?"

"Some orchids cost money," suggested Mr. Darcy diffidently. "Here's Biddy Gilmour. Ask her to fetch Lady Arlington."

Little Biddy Gilmour came and stood in a window of the morning-room, and Jack rushed up to her: "Look, Miss Gilmour! My butterfly—my racing butterfly, you know—he's on that flower! May I at least smash the pot?"

The girl's pretty sixteen-year-old face flushed with laughter, and her eyes opened wide in amused amazement: "The new odontoglossum which arrived from South America last week! No, you may not."

"But my butterfly is on it!" Mr. Hamilton took up a long garden syringe and looked despairingly at Lady Arlington's little secretary. "Mayn't I even squirt him off with this?"

"Oh, my word!" Biddy threw up her hands and turned back into the sitting-room. "I think I had better fetch Lady Arlington."

As the child ran away, Mr. Hamilton apparently gave up his own competitor as a bad job, and came back to make kind enquiries about

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the other three. Condoling affably with Carstone, as he passed, the young man went and stood by the table where Lord Whitmore and Sir Francis Anstruther were standing side by side, staring intently upwards into the leaves of a Virginia creeper which climbed along the top of the morning-room window. Both the remaining butterflies, it appeared, were sitting on leaves above one of the windows, and the impassioned entreaties and wrathful abuse of their proprietors were alike powerless to move them. Whitmore was shaking the thin trunk and branches of the creeper with much disgust, ruefully pointing out the impossibility of climbing it and so making his shouts more effective; and Anstruther was screwing up something in his fingers and eyeing the company with nervous shifty glances, when Lady Arlington appeared in the window.

"I am afraid the conservatory is out of bounds, Mr. Hamilton. Have you killed yours, Lord Carstone? What a pity! So these two are left? Well, here's Harry Seaford, come just in time to see the finish."

As the gracious voice ceased with a ripple of light laughter, more like that of a girl in her teens than of a woman over whose head fifty nervous years had past, Lady Arlington moved aside, and the Marquis of Seaford came out on to the terrace.

When, forty years ago, the ninth Lord Sea-

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ford, father of the present Marquis, lay dying, he sent for Harry's tutor and gave him a brief lecture: "You're a bit of a muff, Hendon," he said, with that charming candour which distinguished the Seaford family; "but you mean well, and I hope you'll take a few last words of advice from me about Harry. My brother is certain to keep you on as guardian to the boy. The little devil's just eleven now, isn't he? They'll save money as much as possible for him till he's of age, so that I should guess he'll find the best part of half-a-million of ready money waiting for him when he's twenty-one, as well as seventy thousand a year. For Heaven's sake don't keep him penniless and tied up in that wretched old dungeon of mine in Cumberland, so that directly he's quit of you he'll turn hell loose all over London and Paris, and get burnt to cinders in its flames. Teach him how to spend money; teach him how to enjoy himself reasonably; teach him, if you can, that there are a few other people in the world besides himself, and that he'll lose nothing by admitting their right to live. If you can make him believe he has some duties towards them, you'll be a clever man; a damned sight cleverer one than my tutor. Good-bye and good luck."

The tutor Hendon, though not very wise, was occasionally threatened with intelligence, and might possibly have carried out this advice if left to himself. Unluckily the uncle and guar-

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dian of the little Marquis was a person absolutely without common sense, and insisted upon the boy being brought up, healthily enough, but without the slightest idea of the joys and excitements which lay beyond the Cumberland hills and hunting fields; nor with any idea that he would one day be a rich man, able to seize the whole joyous earth with both hands and wring pleasure from it till desire failed. Therefore when my young gentleman came of age, and discovered these facts for himself, and had not so much as a school or college friend to help him understand them, he went what the old housekeeper at Mellor called "on the rampage." The men friends of this period of his career were appalling persons, the women were worse. The regulation youth, stamped with the pattern of Eton and Oxford, had nothing to say to a man lacking the common-place hall-mark of their set; and the young Marquis of Seaford passed straight from the cotton wool in which he had been brought up to a life the full description of which would make very wholesome reading if convention allowed it to be written. In the course of his fifty-five years the Marquis had managed to live about ten men's lives, and had spent rather more money than the total value of everything he had or was ever likely to have in this world.

## CHAPTER II

**W**HERE are these gallant competitors? Hiding in the ivy? Ah! I see the wing of one there, and the tail of the other. And the first across the balustrade wins, does it? I'll lay six hundred pounds to four hundred pounds on the one nearest the balustrade. Yours, Carstone, eh? "

"I'll take your bet, Marquis." Sir Francis Anstruther spoke with his usual uneasy swagger, his blotched puffy face twitching nervously and his hands moving restlessly in and out of his pockets. My Lord drew himself up with a faint fastidious look of disgust on his face, and a momentary hesitation of voice and manner, as if he were searching for an excuse to refuse the offered bet so far as this person was concerned. However, he looked round at the other guests, slightly shrugged his shoulders, saying very obviously to himself that it was not worth while to risk unpleasantness for the sake of such trifling sums as he had just mentioned, and nodded confirmation of the wager.

"Watch the balustrade carefully when they begin to move," said Anstruther. "They may both fly out together at any moment, and sail

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across with barely a length between them. Adeane's judge, isn't he? Keep near the balustrade, won't you, old chap."

At the repeated reference to this part of the terrace two or three people moved down there, and the others eyed it intently. In a hasty glance round Anstruther came to the conclusion that all eyes were fixed there, and with some skill he flicked a pellet of paper into the leaves of the ivy where his butterfly was reposing. The creature moved slightly; and as a second pellet, better aimed, struck the leaf on which it was sitting, it floated slowly off and drifted away towards the sunshine.

"Mine's moving! Watch him! Here he comes! Across! Across! There's six hundred in my pocket!" Anstruther pursued his butterfly off the terrace with a fair imitation of the languid excitement of a rich man pretending to be interested in a new bit of gambling.

Biddy Gilmour's voice broke the silence which followed this slightly unwelcome ending to the new race. "Was it quite fair," she asked with affected innocence and politeness, "to flick those two pellets at your butterfly?"

The silence became awkwardly accentuated, and Anstruther scowled furiously round at the faces near him, which had become animated notes of interrogation. "Pellets?" he repeated. "What are you talking about, child?"

Biddy met the bullying look and threatening



Lord Whitmore walked up to the table and put a hand on the remaining tumbler



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attitude with a plucky smile. "Oh, the ones that you flicked into the creeper with your finger and thumb just now. One of them might have touched your butterfly, and no one was to touch them, were they?"

"Touched it?—Pellets?—Rubbish! I—I——"

Sir Francis spluttered vaguely on for another moment or two, while the rest of the guests broke up into little groups and drew markedly away. Gambling was not a very honestly conducted business in their world nowadays, but clumsy swindling of this description had to be noted with disapproval, even under a penalty of revenge if your own more skilled knavery happened to be detected later. Anstruther had an excellent gift of silence, and a firm belief in its efficacy during such crises, so did not embarrass Lady Arlington with any more appeals for justice. He walked away, giving a surly nod of acquiescence to Seaford's politely worded suggestion: "Perhaps if there has been any accidental breaking of the rules we had better call all bets off"; and added Biddy and the Marquis to a long mental list of persons to whom some injury must be done on the first possible opportunity. Like most men of his kind Anstruther kept a private and well-posted judgment book, in which every offence against himself was clearly marked, with the punishment which he meant to mete out to the offender when his chance came.

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Seaford and Lady Arlington followed the burly, vengeful figure with half pitying eyes.

"Poor Frank Anstruther's morals and manners and nerves have suffered severe shipwreck in his recent storms." Seaford's forehead and eyelids contracted with nervous pain, as if he were witnessing the shipwreck from a boat which was hurrying dreadfully near to the same rocks. "It happens so occasionally to us gamblers."

"Don't talk nonsense," said the woman sharply. "If I catch yours suffering there'll be a storm which will make your head sing." She put a hand on his arm and looked anxiously at the contracted forehead. "Are things going about as wrong as usual?"

"Wrong!" The lines on the broad high forehead grew deeper, and a look of almost intolerable weariness spread suddenly over the massive figure and stern face. "Ah, wrong, wrong, wrong! Does gambling ever go right at the end? I'm a galley-slave, toiling, fretting, wearying in a gambler's chains, without a ray of excitement or pleasure. When I want pleasure I must go back into the past and play with its souvenirs as prisoners play with little birds."

"And we have some souvenirs, you and I," said the woman, in her soft voice.

"Ah, faith, and we have some! Do you remember the day at Ascot when my old Pater raced the French mare right along every yard of the Cup course, and beat her on the post by

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the breadth of your hand? Do you remember when Jimmey Carlisle's three-year-old Kingfisher was beating my filly Eglantine at Newmarket?" The Marquis's voice rose and his eyes brightened, while my Lady smiled sympathetically; perhaps, however, a close observer might have read in her face that these were not quite the souvenirs to which she had referred. "And Kingfisher swerved in the last ten strides in spite of all that Archer could do, and let us win? A hundred thousand pounds hung on that swerve, and I think when I lie a-dying my eyes will see it, and my ears will hear the roar of the crowd when Kingfisher faltered and Archer snatched up his whip!"

"Your horses still have their runs of luck." By an effort Lady Arlington still kept the note of sympathy in her voice.

"Dolly, the fun's gone from it all!" Seaford huddled back into his corner again, gloom and misery settling down again in his eyes. "The thrill and the joy have all gone, and one sits at card-tables now, and drives to Epsom and Ascot, in dull, sullen routine fashion, much as your housemaids light the fires and make the beds. Let's talk of something more cheerful. They tell me you have got poor Ned Gilmour's little daughter as secretary, or companion, or something of that sort."

"Little Biddy? Yes; I am getting old, and she writes my letters, and tells lies for me when

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I won't see dull people, and gives me a summary of all the poetry books which men like George Allison send me, who write magnificently for posterity and don't share my doubts as to the book reaching its destination. The chaplain at Beddowes is in love with her already, so she'll soon disappear, I'm afraid."

"What, the chaplain Trent? My good friend Richard Trent? You wanted me to get a deanery for him, and on my honour I did my best. I told Disraeli that next time he had one to give away I'd play him for it at piquet or écarté, whichever he liked, and stake any reasonable sum against it; but the fellow wouldn't—afraid of its getting into the papers, I suppose. But I'll try again for the good parson if Biddy wants to marry him. Ned Gilmour's daughter ought to be a good sort."

"She is; a very good sort." Lady Arlington answered the remark with unusual heartiness and then suddenly checked herself, as though afraid that any enlargement on it might bore her companion. It was a curious factor in Lord Seaford's life that a large number of men and women, including several who could not have the slightest earthly reason for caring twopence about what he thought of them, seemed to be physically afraid of him, as though they expected him to knock them head over heels if they vexed him. "Doesn't Pamela Carstone look nice to-day?" she continued anxiously, pointing to

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where the girl was talking vivaciously to Lord Whitmore. "Four of her lovers are here, so she is quite happy. But why, oh, why doesn't someone strangle her grandmother!"

Seaford leant forward and studied the Dowager Lady Carstone with malevolent eyes. "Since the rash and foolish abolition of the ducking stool," he said grimly, "there's no cure for matchmaking women like that. How long on an average does Lady Carstone spend in the company of what she would call an 'eligible' man before she offers Pamela to him?"

"Ten minutes, as a rule; or twelve, if he is French and can't get the hang of her Parisian-Scotch accent. I loathe having her here."

"Give me a woman like you, my dear, or Biddy's mother," laughed Seaford. "You would both look on in petrified terror at a daughter falling in love, and if it ended in a wedding you would think her a bold, not very respectable explorer, who had gone out and discovered men, marriage, babies, and such-like improper novelities for the first time. How is young Whitmore regarded by the matchmaker?"

"Not very amiably, I think." Lady Arlington's voice grew strained and unwilling, as though she realised quite well that the question meant something more than was implied in the speaker's careless tone. "Perhaps an even less business-like woman might look doubtfully at a youth who is barely visible for the crowd of race-

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horses and money-lenders and mistresses which surrounds him. So of course Pamela adores him."

"She would, you know." Seaford laughed, and then looked gloomy again. "Is it true, by the way, that her dreadful young fop of a brother is in love with Eleanor Hamilton? My affection for Pamela has survived every test of the last ten years, but it's badly strained when young Carstone comes to me with her."

"Yes, it's quite true. Shall I call Eleanor here? I must go myself," said Lady Arlington, rising reluctantly from her bench, "and talk to some of these people."

"No, no, no!" was the petulant answer. "I don't love to hear of such marriages. People like these will be married by a croupier from a gambling-saloon, and give birth to dice. Send Pamela to me—ah! here she comes, with Norman Stanier."

Miss Pamela Carstone, who had left the terrace a few moments before with various other guests, in a stampede which took place for the purpose of avoiding speech with Sir Francis Anstruther, re-entered now, accompanied by a man who had recently made himself conspicuous by gaining admission to her inner circle of admirers. How he got into this constellation of light-hearted, empty-headed, idle, gambling youths, and why he wanted to stay there was a never-ending puzzle to his acquaintances, unless,

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perchance, said some of them, he had honestly fallen in love with the beautiful girl who was its sun. That he liked her conversation, one-third of whose sentences began with the name of a horse, and another with the words "I'll bet you a sovereign," seemed improbable; that he wanted her dowry was equally unlikely, since Sir Norman Stanier's income was considerable; and his face during a racing conversation expressed vehemently his entire willingness to pay two years' revenue if he might escape. Yet for a month past Stainer had been kneeling at Pamela's feet pouring out clumsy compliments, and humble uncouth admiration, and eager offers of what he regarded as entertainment. His age was something between forty and forty-five, and in the present company his morals would have been regarded as austere to the highest point of severity.

"I will show you," he was saying to Pamela as they entered, "the original manuscript of 'Paradise Lost' with corrections in Milton's own handwriting, whenever you care to come to Cambridge."

The words brought him near to where Lady Arlington was standing, and she asked politely whether the new history had been moving on steadily.

"Thank you, thank you. I have been somewhat disturbed lately by a new German pamphlet on Erasmus."



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"You know," said the hostess, turning to Seaford with the double intention of including him in the conversation and putting an end to the threatened discourse on Erasmus, "Sir Norman is beginning a complete and really unprejudiced history of the Reformation."

"Good gracious!" The Marquis restrained himself by an effort from flinging up his hands to heaven, and merely retreated precipitately towards the windows, blocking up one of them lest another unprejudiced or prejudiced historian should attempt to cut off his retreat to the luncheon table. Pamela ran after him and clutched his arm in pretended terror.

"He has been saying the most dreadful things to me," said the girl; and there was just a touch of real dislike and alarm in her voice which drew an exclamation of amazement and wrath from Seaford; "the most dreadful things, about musty old books and stupid poems and Popes and painters. And he told me a Latin joke. He said it was a joke, you see, so I knew and laughed."

"Is he another lover?" asked Seaford with an indulgent smile. Apparently this young person was a great favourite, for the Marquis's voice and manner had become caressingly tender.

"I suppose he's another," said Pamela woe-fully. "He's coming to sit next to me at luncheon, he says, to tell me all about a new painter

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he's discovered at Florence called Botticelli. Fancy a new painter being called after your horse who won the St. Leger years and years ago!"

"What will Whitmore and Jack Hamilton and Mons. d'Hautepaille say to Stanier sitting next to you to-day?"

The girl tossed her head with an airy laugh. "They can't all quarrel with me at once. That's the comfort of numbers."

"But if some of them prefer Exodus? The first favourite perhaps? Now, Pamela,"—Seaford was smiling as he looked down on the beautiful young face with the rose-pink shadows chasing one another across its cheeks, but there was real anxiety in his voice—"tell me about Whitmore. I've got you alone for a moment, and I want to be posted in the last news."

The girl looked down at her smart gold-buckled shoes with the ludicrously pointed toes, concerning which her brother had once stated admiringly that they could kick out the eye of a mosquito in one kick. "What is there to tell about Lord Whitmore?" she asked shyly.

"Is he favourite still? Come, Pamela,"—the man's voice became graver as Miss Carstone merely shrugged her shoulders—"I've known every secret of yours since you left school. Tell me this one."

"Grandma hates him," said a small and very miserable voice. "She says there isn't a coun-

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try in Europe where he doesn't owe enough money to pay its national debt. And anyhow—he doesn't seem to care for me very much."

"Lady Carstone would approve more highly of Stanier?" suggested the Marquis maliciously. "He has eighty thousand pounds a year, you know, with the finest deer forest and castle in Scotland, a palace in Derbyshire, and, in case you like to play the queen, a certainty of any embassy or governorship he likes to ask for."

As Seaford spoke the girl looked up suddenly; he saw a great sudden light flit across her face like the reflection of a bird's silver wing passing there; and her lips parted and her dark eyes shone out a radiant welcome. Lord Whitmore was coming back on to the terrace. Yet, as the Marquis looked away from Pamela's face for a moment, and then back to it, he saw a new expression come there and stay, an expression of doubt, almost of fear, the look with which a child greets a grown-up playmate whose movements can be pleasantly entertaining, but can be, and have been, vaguely and horribly terrifying. Then, as Whitmore approached the pair, Lady Carstone took Stanier firmly by the arm and brought him across to join them; while Pamela looked helplessly from one to the other.

"I believe at the bottom of her heart she dislikes both of them," said the Marquis to himself.

## CHAPTER III

**T**HE author of the new and impartial history of the Reformation which had been commended to the Marquis of Seaford's notice by Lady Arlington, looked somewhat out of place among the men assembled on the terrace of the old Chelsea house. Tall, upright and grave, with the semblance of age which gravity gives, Stanier's entrance left an impression of an Oxford don walking into the middle of an undergraduate's supper party. He was out of place here, and looked it, and knew it, and resented having been asked to meet these people. He had watched the butterfly race with such scorn on his face that no one standing near him had dared for the moment to show much excitement; he had seen Anstruther's dishonesty, and had so obviously regarded it as a perfectly natural and ordinary proceeding in this company that Lady Arlington, reading his face, would have loved to box his ears.

The famous hostess saw her blunder—a very rare one to be found at her entertainments—and wished that she had not been hurried into it by a good-natured desire to let Stanier meet Pamela Carstone again. For not only did Lady Arlington pride herself on never having a jarring note

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at her parties, nor allowing any guest to feel bored or uncomfortable for a moment, but Sir Norman Stanier was a very great personage indeed, both in the literary and political worlds, and it annoyed her to think that even with a kindly motive she should have been so *gauche* as to thrust him among this racing crowd.

Stanier was as bored as he looked. In his own little world he was never asked to talk about a subject for which he did not care, nor with people who did not care about it more or less as much as himself. His forty-five years had been passed among men and women to whom a great play, an election at the French Academy, a new star in the Scandinavian literary firmament, or the discovery of a new Egyptian tomb, were all possible topics of conversation, and often of conversation in equally fluent English, French, or German. A tribe of Choctaw Indians could not have been more unknown to Sir Norman than his present company, and would have been incomparably more interesting. Lord Seaford and his friends were a mere collection of swindling gamblers in Stanier's mind; their lives were as dull as some odd volumes which he had once read of the Newgate Calendar; their actual talk was barely intelligible to him. When he heard Seaford offering to lay six hundred pounds to four hundred pounds on a butterfly doing something or other, Sir Norman had a mere vague impression of a madman talking

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Cherokee deliriously, and had no more defined feeling in the matter than a desire to get out of the lunatic's immediate neighbourhood.

With regard to this especial man, however, Stanier had once held sterner views. Years ago a very-dearly beloved friend of his had fallen under Seaford's influence, and abandoned philosophy and diplomacy for the joys of Newmarket. In rage and despair Stanier devoted months of valuable time to reclaiming him, bought the *Sportsman* and went to Newmarket himself in order that he might argue more effectively, and found out every discreditable act in the lives of the lad's new friends in order to hold them up imploringly for his avoidance. During these months there was no one whom Stanier learnt to hate and fear more than he did Seaford, though a certain sullen respect found a place in his feelings. If his laws of honour were the devil's code, Seaford at least carried them out gallantly. If the boy under his tutorship gambled insanely, he was at least made to pay his losses on every settling day, and to lose a fortune or win one with a polite smile; and when he finally confessed his ruin, the Marquis paid all his debts and drove him away to take up a little diplomatic appointment in Persia. Yet when the Marquis's friends held up their hands in wondering admiration, they were surprised to find that Stanier refused to join them.

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To the follies of a man when he is confronted with a clever as well as pretty girl, there never has been and never will be a limit. Willingly or unwillingly he must come into her train, forget fame and fortune and friends so that he may stand at her side and touch her hand, fling away the ambitions of a lifetime for a love whisper, and sell his soul to feel her lips against his own. The boy fresh from Oxford, his brain throbbing with a hundred schemes of world-conquest; the middle-aged politician, scholar and ruler of men, with a score of coldly calculated plans for their good and his own; the monk in his cell doughtily resolved to renounce the world, the flesh and the devil: the whole lot of them and their resolutions melt like wax when each man's special tempter (every bird has its own decoy, and every man may choose his own road to ruin) comes along. Stanier had chosen his—the bright eyes, and laughing lips, and tall, round, restless figure of Pamela Carstone.

The girl meant him no wrong. In her own set no man would have paid the slightest attention to the few amiable words which in the course of the last six or eight weeks she had flung to Sir Norman Stanier. In this Chelsea house to-day there was scarcely a man to whom she had not given greater favours; this one had been allowed to hold her hand for ten minutes, or put his arm round her waist, in a drive from dinner to theatre; that one had held her tight and

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kissed her in some half-lit conservatory or palm-hidden corner; another had looked at her with inviting eyes, with hinted questions and unrebuked suggestions. All the dreary lore of vice and dishonour had been an open book to this girl since she was in her teens; she needed scarce a week's acquaintance with a man to tell just how far she might let him go with safety to herself; and beyond such self-preservation she had very little care for anything or anybody in the world. The idea that Norman Stanier was falling in love with her, and that she could do him any serious injury by making a few jokes to him, putting a hand on his arm while he showed her a book, or listening politely to his talk, would have sounded ridiculous to her. Miss Carstone's other lovers had adopted much more forward proceedings before she felt obliged to take them in hand.

Lady Carstone's feeling towards her granddaughter was one of mild dislike tempered by occasional amusement. She herself was a very gay personage, who had had plenty of fun and laughter out of her sixty years, and meant to have plenty more out of the remaining twenty-five which she had allotted to herself. Pamela kept a due proportion of her wit and good-humour for home consumption, and Lady Carstone never seriously regretted having taken the girl to live with her when her mother died. Pamela was only thirteen years old at the time,



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and the Dowager lady had been rather severely tried for the first two or three years, during which time she and Pamela had each supposed it to be the proper thing to pretend that the latter was an innocent baby, caring for dolls, school tales and children's tea parties. Afternoon callers and luncheon guests in London had to be silenced when this child was present, and Lady Carstone would certainly have handed her over to another relative very shortly if she had not one day overheard the young lady repeating to a schoolroom friend a story which she had heard told by some visitor the day before. The point of the story—it was not a very nice point—was apparently quite clear to the little narrator's mind; and thereafter Pamela and her grandmother lived together on frank and friendly terms till the former's twentieth birthday. At this period Lady Carstone expressed a very decided opinion that it was time Pamela was married; she had no fancy, she said tartly, for taking out a girl during an indefinite number of seasons. Pamela responded firmly that she shared her grandmother's taste for wide and general flirtation, and could not undertake to marry one man when she was in love with twelve.

“Why doesn't she take the richest of them, like any other sensible girl?” moaned Lady Carstone to her chief friend and crony, Emmeline Ilford.

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"Well, that would be poor old Manford himself, wouldn't it?" asked Mrs. Ilford. "He's got piles of money, of course, but he is a bit old. My cousin Jennie meant to marry him—she would have been his fourth wife, wouldn't she?—and was actually engaged to him for a few weeks, but he overheard someone telling her that instead of any of the usual wedding hymns she ought to have 'Rock of Ages'; and she laughed; so he broke it off."

"I don't want to be unkind to the girl," said Lady Carstone restlessly, "but really she must select one of the more possible of her men and settle down with him before next season. What on earth can I do?"

"Compromise her with one of them, my dear," said the other briefly. "It's the easiest thing in the world to do with a scatter-brained girl like that." And Lady Carstone offered due gratitude for the advice. In the case of a young person, however, who knew so much of the world, she foresaw difficulties in the way of following such practical counsel.

At the present moment Pamela was thoroughly happy. She was as nearly in love with Whitmore as she had ever been with anyone in her life, and he was in love with her; she realised that Stanier was a well-known and much-courted personage in London, and she was quite aware that he had come to this highly uncongenial party for her sake; she loved and admired

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Lord Seaford beyond all other friends, trusted him, depended on him and understood him, and he too was by her side now. Also, she was the best dressed person here, and incomparably the prettiest; and she had just invented a new sort of race, the fame of which would run through London with her name attached to it. Could one want much more to fill up life's cup of bliss?

"Tell us which of your horses have chances at Ascot next week," she said to Whitmore. "Is the Lightning filly christened yet?"

"I have been waiting to see if she is good or bad," said the young man eagerly. "As she turns out to be the best in the stable, I venture to wonder whether I might call her Pamela."

Miss Carstone laughed and made a low mock courtesy. "I am honoured and delighted. At luncheon we will drink good luck to the new Pamela."

"Is it really an honour," asked Sir Norman, "to give your name to a horse—one of the stupidest animals in the whole scheme of creation?" His voice had that tone of extravagantly polite wonder in it which makes the other man stand still suddenly two or three times during the subsequent day, and wonder whether the question was or was not meant for an insult.

"The stupidest!" echoed Seaford. "My good friend, what about sheep, and cabinet ministers, and retired colonels, and——"

"I pit your horses against them all," said the

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other, with contemptuous good-humour. "Once I thought a horse must be clever to win a race; but someone took me to Epsom, and the winning post was not, I found, a pole which the horses must climb at the end of the race, and knock a leg of ham off the top. They need do nothing but run fast."

"Quite true," said Seaford politely; "perfectly true. What keen powers of observation you have!"

Stanier looked round him with slow scorn, and went on, with no deliberate intention, perhaps, of hurting the feelings of any hearer: "Some men—you're the only one I know, Seaford—might manage to make life on the turf look interesting to an outsider. But the other racing folk—Heavens, what bores they are!"

"Men and women equally, I suppose?" asked Whitmore, with aggressive insolence in his voice; then he turned to Pamela, deftly including her: "Do you feel as small and crushed as I do?"

Stanier saw and smoothed away his blunder: "I altogether decline to number Miss Carstone among such people," he said. "Once in an old tumble-down aviary I saw a bird of paradise shut up by accident with some crows and young vultures. It was funny to see the pretty thing hopping about, trying to look happy, and making friends with its horrible companions. But no one, you see, would ever have mistaken them

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for friends. I speak in parables, like the Hebrew prophets."

"Small wonder," said the Marquis smoothly, "that they were sometimes stoned." He moved away with Lady Carstone as he spoke, and Whitmore came nearer to Pamela.

"Have you issued orders," he asked, "about the places next to you at lunch? May I have one?"

"Oh, I don't know," said the girl petulantly, following Lord Seaford with her eyes; "you're all so dull after him."

"Is the Marquis so very interesting?" asked Stanier gloomily. "Of course he's a great and popular institution in London just now——"

"You're quite right," said the girl, beaming again. "He's not only a man, but a habit. And I like nice habits."

"*Nice habits?*" asked the other meaningly.

"Yes, indeed!" Pamela's eyes were alight now, and the shell-pink of her cheeks deepened and glowed. "Lord Seaford's a real practical reformer who spends all his life in keeping vice on a high level. He pays every debt he makes on the day it's due, whether it's a pound to me about some date being right or wrong, or the hundred thousand pounds which he lost over last month's Derby. How many of you do that with your debts? He's been in love with a score of women, and wouldn't marry one of them for fear they should suffer by his gambling. How

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many men think twice about what price their wives and children are to pay for their follies and sins? He pesters no one with his racing-talk till he knows for sure that they are interested in it. How many of you can say that for your fads? And if any man, woman, or child is in any trouble which money can cure, Harry Seaford's cheque-book is open before the tale is half told, and he scrawls down the first figures which comes to his ears in their story. Those may be bad habits, but they're good enough for me."

"I suppose,"—Sir Norman spoke half to himself, and in the cold meditative voice which intimated that he was seriously pondering a new point of view,—“I suppose Lord Seaford couldn't be so bad a man unless he had all the capability for being a very great one."

If someone had taken Sir Norman Stanier aside, and soberly and at some length discussed with him the advisability of making this remark to Pamela Carstone, he would have pointed out, first and chiefly, that the remark was true; secondly that it was a good thing for young girls to hear a well-balanced judgment pronounced on their friends; and thirdly that the judgment in question would be found on examination to be rather complimentary than otherwise. Neither Pamela nor Whitmore, however, took him aside for this purpose; the former favoured him with a highly indignant look, and the latter

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with a little laugh, and then they moved away together. Stanier retreated towards his hostess.

"I have been admiring Miss Carstone," he said ruefully, "ever since I met her six weeks ago, and I have been offending her every time I speak to her. Tell me, is she really friends with these racing people? And does she truthfully know anything about their desolate sport?"

Lady Arlington stared at the speaker in speechless astonishment. She had seen his story days ago—that he was in love with this girl, unwillingly, without much experience of similar proceedings, and with no very clear idea of her character. How much he cared, and how ignorant he was, my Lady only realised now for the first time. And she realised, too, that in this man's face was the shadow of the possibility of terrible tragedy, of passion, resolution, and stern action such as she had not seen, and did not want to see, on this terrace, where guests matched butterflies against one another and told her of love-affairs with new dancers. On the whole she was in favour of Sir Norman Stanier, as against Lord Whitmore or any of his set; Pamela was a friend of hers, and she would as willingly have put the girl into a cage with a young and lively cobra as into the bonds of matrimony with Lord Whitmore. The cobra would make things lively for a short time, but in the end his fangs would do the unpleasant

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work for which nature and habit had formed them. Yet, with the best will in the world to help such a stupid man as Sir Norman, what on earth could one do?

"Lord Seaford's one of Pamela's best friends in all London," she said impressively; "and Pamela has been at every ordinary race meeting in England every year since she was fifteen."

"I thought——" stammered Stanier; "I thought——"

"Don't think too much, Sir Norman," said Lady Arlington, with a winning smile. "Look and listen and believe exactly what you see and hear."

"But——" Stanier began another stammering sentence; "but does she genuinely care——"

"If you want to please her, Sir Norman, you must not only take her, with her grandmother, to Cambridge to show her the Milton manuscripts, but to a little village near by called Newmarket, to show her the winner of the July stakes. And mind she backs it, too!—This is all Greek to you, I see."

"I must confess to being not very familiar with such expressions. Roughly speaking, however, you are advising me to take Miss Carstone to Newmarket, and select the winner of a big race, and put money on it for her. I can and will do the first and the third of these, but about the other I am doubtful. Horses always seem to



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me to be of the same shape and colour, so that there is no means of judging beforehand which can gallop faster than the other. Even if I asked the jockey he might tell me wrong."

Lady Arlington smiled doubtfully. It was the nearest approach ever made by Sir Norman Stanier to humour, that no one knew on certain occasions whether he was being humorous or serious. "Pamela's knowledge of racing," she said "will be quite enough for both of you. Take her to Newmarket one day and leave the rest to luck . . . I'm really very hungry and I shouldn't wonder if everybody else was. I think we may as well go in to lunch."

Whitmore found himself, to his great indignation, seated a long way from Miss Carstone, and his discontent was not lessened by the fact that Stanier was next to her. Nor was it in any degree lessened by a card which a footman put into his hands towards the middle of lunch. It bore the name of "Miss Cora Acland." The young man rose from the table, his face very white, and with some muttered words of apology went out into the hall. A discreet and omniscient butler was waiting for him there.

"I did my best to keep her out, my Lord," he murmured, "but it couldn't be done without a row. There's been a man here, too, my Lord, the money-lender, Levi Randall; but I persuaded him to go."

"What the devil do they all want, Prescott?"

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Whitmore stared at the sage and solemn face before him in genuine bewilderment.

"There's a rumour got abroad that your Lordship's leaving England to-night," said Prescott in a tone of delicate enquiry. "Both of them mentioned it. Randall believed me and took himself off when I assured him it wasn't true; the—er—lady didn't. I think the quietest plan would be for your Lordship to see her."

Whitmore swore vaguely and feebly, in the fashion of a man who would merely gain time for a little thought.

"She's in the morning-room, my Lord. Perhaps it would be as well to go to her at once. I put her there as it's some distance away from the dining-room, and the lady seemed inclined to—talk a good deal."

"All right, I'll go to her," said the young man, moving away with white lips and lagging footsteps. "I say, Prescott, go into the dining-room and ask Lord Seaford to come and join me. Say it's a—a—lawyer who wants to see both of us for a moment on some business. Send him quick before the girl has time to get up steam for a row. Oh, what a well-managed country Turkey is! I wish I lived there."

Prescott slipped the sovereign which Whitmore gave him into his pocket, and stood for a moment anxiously studying doors and distances, like a general surveying a prospective battle-field

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“Go to the front door,” he said to a youthful footman, “and see if there’s a Bobby hanging about; if so, tell him to keep on hanging about. The lady has nails and a temper; and she may be going to have hysterics, too.”

## CHAPTER IV

**T**HE eleven-year-old boy and ten-year-old girl who were left on the terrace, when the rest of the party moved away to luncheon, looked round them in some boredom. In a few moments a maid would come and take them for a walk; and as a visit to a picture gallery was to be included in the afternoon's entertainment, the boy viewed the prospect with profound gloom. He was up from school because two or three of the boys had retired to a sanatorium with measles, and his first flush of gratitude to Brown minor, who had introduced the malady to the school, was dying away.

The Countess of Arlington was an aunt about whom one boasted freely in public, but in private one found her strict rules about the bringing up of the young rather a bore. Reggie, for instance, desired to go into lunch now, not so much for eating purposes, since the roast mutton with which he had been provided at one o'clock had been plentiful, but in order to study the sayings and doings of Whitmore. With the diabolical instinct belonging to his years, he had discovered the latter's love affair; and though it is sad to see one's model sportsman and ideal companion afflicted in this fashion, one does like to see the matter through to a finish.

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"I suppose we may as well get ready to go out," said Marjorie, with a sigh. She was interested in the affair, too, but as a friend of Pamela and a partisan of Sir Norman Stanier. The eyes and ears and tongues of these two children would be serious factors in the drama of Pamela's life.

"I wish there was anything to do, when we got out. It would be as lively to stay here." Reggie's gloom was deepening every minute.

"I heard Lord Whitmore say just now," said Marjorie, with a delicate giggle, "that this terrace was like heaven; so I suppose we ought to be satisfied here."

"I wish," said the boy, leaning over the balustrade and studying the view as if he saw escape and joy and hope before him, "that I might go out to the other place, and play with the little devils . . . Hullo! Who's this? Someone late for lunch? Let's tell him the party is put off till to-morrow."

A footman was showing a man into the morning-room; or to be precise, a man walked into the morning-room, followed by a protesting footman, who in his turn was followed shortly afterwards by Prescott. The latter, as we have hinted, was not unused to these emergencies.

"You can't possibly see the Earl of Whitmore now," he said firmly; "his Lordship is with a large party at luncheon."

Mr. Levi Randall, a leading member of the fra-

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ternity which offers in public, but, it is generally understood, declines in private, to "lend money to any amount, without security, on note of hand alone," laughed genially. He was a broad, good-humoured-looking person, to whom his clients owed money light-heartedly for their allotted span, with a comfortable conviction that Randall would renew the bills without remonstrance and without charge at the end of six months. When the six months were over they studied Mr. Randall's chin, and wondered how they could have been so foolish.

"Well, I'm going to see him, my good friend, and you may take that from me straight. He's leaving the country to-night, I hear, and I've got a little business to do with him first."

"His Lordship is engaged," repeated Prescott, with the mechanical voice of fate which had served him very well in numerous similar emergencies.

"Do you know what I am, young man?" The footman had retired discreetly, and Randall did not see the wide eyes of the two children watching him joyfully from the terrace. "I'll tell you. I'm a money-lender. I'm a very useful person to know when fine fellows like you want an extra fiver to back some of the racing tips which are always flying about wherever the Marquis goes. If you'll oblige me now, I may come in handy when you want a pound or two."

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"I'm quite satisfied with what I've got, thank you."

"Are you really now, by George," said Randall, with a short laugh; "I should think the doctors would give something for your brain, to take it out and put it among their other freaks."

Prescott smiled in polite appreciation of the joke. Then he grew persuasive, and his persuasions—as he told Whitmore afterwards—were effective. "It will readily save trouble, sir, if you will come out quietly at once. You can't want a disturbance any less than I do. I give you my word, if the Earl is going abroad to-night, it can only be for a few days, as I know he will be back for Ascot. I'll give him any message you like; but this isn't his house and you can't stay here."

"How are you going to prevent me?"

Prescott spread out his hands, with a deprecating hint in every one of his fingers that Mr. Randall knew the answer to the question without the need of anything so vulgar as words. Randall took up his hat and prepared to depart, having accomplished his mission very much in the fashion that he had anticipated.

"I want you," he said, "to be sure and tell Lord Whitmore that I came here, and that you had a good deal of difficulty in persuading me to go; and that before he goes abroad to-night he had better, for his own sake, come round and see me. I'm getting a bit sick of his affairs; and for

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the future he won't have to send messages downstairs to my clerks or office boys, but to come and deal with me personally. Tell him all that, will you?"

As Randall left the room the two small cousins on the terrace turned to one another with excited giggles.

"A money-lender!" said Reggie, waltzing delightedly past the windows. "And he was after Lord Whitmore!"

"Lots of them come to see Father," said Marjorie, a comical mixture of importance and resignation on her face; "but they never offer to lend him pounds like that man did to Prescott. I expect Father would like to know that man."

Reggie's waltz suddenly stopped; he put a cautioning hand on his young cousin's shoulder and drew her against the ivy of a window. "Here's a girl now," he said. "Awfully smartly dressed, too. Looks rather queer."

"Lots of them come to see Father, too," whispered Marjorie, and prepared herself to listen comfortably to more revelations.

The newcomer's face was "set stormy." Matters promised well for a scene.

"I assure you, madam," said Prescott wearily, but with more alarm on his face than had been visible there during the previous interview; it was not the first time he had met the lady, and the prestige of victory was not on his side at this moment. "I assure you the Earl has only just



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gone into luncheon and cannot possibly come out and see you."

"Don't worry yourself to repeat that again." The visitor strolled towards one of the windows, holding out a card on which "Miss Cora Acland" was engraved. So painful was the influence of previous defeats that Prescott took the card with only a vague murmur of disapproval. "Run away and take that card to Lord Whitmore, and tell him I will wait here till he comes."

The butler realised that this was a case of compromise. "Look here, madam," he said sternly, "I'll take your card in to the Earl of Whitmore on one condition—that you promise me to go away without any more words if he says he can't see you now."

"Oh!" The visitor tossed her head with an airy laugh which carried a hopeless conviction of defeat to the butler's soul, since it meant that his antagonist would promise what she pleased and do what she pleased: "I'll go away if he doesn't come out. Just you tell him I'm here, and he'll come; don't fret yourself."

Prescott departed slowly and sorrowfully; and Miss Cora Acland, after glancing round the morning-room and deciding that there was nothing in it worthy of her attention, stepped out on the terrace. Reggie and Marjorie, having backed away from their point of observation in time to anticipate this movement, stood in the middle of

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the terrace regarding her with hopeful and fearful joy.

"Hullo, kiddies!" As Miss Acland caught sight of the children she looked pleased for a moment, then vexed, then as if someone were trying to tie up her hands in the middle of a free fight: "Fine day, isn't it? Have some chocolates?"

The lady produced a little gold sweet-box, which she held out to the children with a careless gesture; but there was a curious look on her face contradicting the carelessness. Her face indeed expressed so much that when Reggie took a couple of chocolates with polite thanks, and Marjorie put her hands behind her back and drew slowly away, it said very plainly: "I thought so; I knew that would happen."

"It must be very dull in London for small people like you," the woman went on, without seeming to notice the rebuff. "Don't you wish you were on the river, in a boat under the trees?"

"Yes, rather!" Reggie looked up respectfully at a person who could so divine his wishes, and might possibly be in a position to gratify them; "but we are going to Ascot next week with our aunt."

Miss Acland looked across at Marjorie: "Are you going, too?" she asked casually.

The little maid looked away across the river, and walked a few more steps towards the edge of the terrace. Lady Arlington herself could

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not have put more endless miles of distance between herself and a companion whose speech she resented: "I—I—don't know," said the child quietly. "Yes, I suppose so."

A little spasm of pain contracted the woman's face, and she went up to Marjorie and put her hand on the child's shoulder. "Why, what's the matter, kiddie?" she asked. "Do you think I want to eat you? Do you suppose——"

Another footstep sounded on the terrace; there was an exclamation of anger, and Miss Acland's hand was roughly tossed from the child's shoulder.

"If you want something to lean on," said Whitmore's voice low and furious, "here's a bench and there's a table. Run away, children!" The man looked steadily at his companion, his face twitching with rage, while the children moved slowly indoors. "Now, what do you mean by this? How dare you follow me here?"

Miss Acland gave herself one brief general shake, as if she would scatter at once all the mental and bodily effects of her recent moment of sentiment. "Do let me advise you, my good boy," she said coolly, "not to talk to me in that fashion. The things which I do when anyone gets my monkey up would make you lie down and howl with terror."

"I'm not specially alarmed," Whitmore answered; and in truth his rage seemed to have

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banished fear for a moment. "I have asked Lord Seaford, who has absolute authority in this house, to come up to me as soon as he can. Then if you don't go quietly we can take our own measures. What are you here for?"

"You are going to Paris to-night, en route to St. Petersburg, Central Asia, Japan and the Lord knows where. Isn't that so? And I and little Pearl Graham and Jennie Nisbet—not to mention a couple of hundred money-lenders, tailors, and people of that sort—were to hear the news to-morrow morning, I suppose, and to come in pursuit if we could? But you never had any luck, old boy, and you see I heard the news last night. That's why I'm here."

Whitmore looked so entirely and genuinely amazed that the woman moved back a pace or two, eyeing him doubtfully. "The whole of the statement," said the young man, glancing desperately round him, "is a piece of imagination, except the one fact that I am going to Paris to-night. Would you mind going away?"

"I never remember your telling me," the woman answered irresolutely, "a word of truth on any subject under the sun. I believe you are one of those people who hardly know whether they are lying or not, but so far as they do know anything about it, prefer to lie. I wonder where you really are going, and for how long."

"I'm going to Paris to-night to see the Grand Prix on Sunday." Whitmore spoke quietly

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enough, but the eyes which peered into the room beyond, in search of help, were almost mad with fear. "I'm coming back in time for Ascot. That's the truth about my movements. How much you choose to believe of it I don't care a penny."

"And now,"—Miss Cora Acland drew herself together like a cat which has been playing with a helpless bird, and has at last made up its mind to finish the creature off—"and now let's pass on for a moment to the subject of Miss Pamela Carstone."

Whitmore folded his arms with something like a sigh of relief, as if he were glad at last to be coming to grips with his companion, and so arriving within sight of the end. "Would you be seriously annoyed," he asked, "if I hinted to you that my friend the Marquis of Seaford will be here in a moment, and that when he comes he will summon the police?"

"But," suggested Cora, "if I, in the meantime, summon Miss Pamela Carstone——?"

Whitmore's nerves seemed to give way suddenly at this second mention of Pamela's name. "Why do you hunt me about like this?" he stammered. His hands fell to his side, and his face looked ghastly under the June sunlight. "I'll tell you on my word I'm only going to Paris for a week. The rest of your story is moonshine. Can't you go away? If you want

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more money I'll send you some this afternoon. I've got none with me here."

As the young man finished his appeal he looked up and his face flushed red with relief. Lord Seaford was coming through the room on to the terrace. Cora saw him, too; saw the polite chilly smile of the middle-aged man of the world, to whom love and hatred, lust, greed and revenge, are old and stale stories, told to him, and told by him, and re-told, and re-told, till all earth and hell might be defied to add anything new to them; and she guessed rightly enough that if this man had taken Whitmore's life in hand he would manage it very much as a housemaid manages a room full of cobwebs. And she would be one of the cobwebs.

Seaford looked keenly round him and shrugged his shoulders. "The story tells itself," he said. "What can I do?" He turned to the woman with a gracious smile which she tried to meet boldly. "You want money, madam, of course. Would you name your price, and mention incidentally whether you are willing to take half?"

"You men with your cheque-books!" said Cora, with quiet scorn which lent a certain amount of dignity to the coarsely handsome face; "you pitiful things, with your contemptible belief that a silly piece of paper with some

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figures scrawled across it squares accounts with everybody you have wronged in this world and the next! Look you, Lord Seaford, your friend there has taken my life and soul, my reputation, and—and—God help me! how both of you will laugh when I talk of such a thing!—all the love I ever had in me except one bit . . . for Nancy. Now he's tired of me. I weary him because, instead of making jokes for him, and tricking myself out in the height of next season's fashions so as to do him credit, I must ask for more housekeeping money, and clothes for his two children, and pennies to have them taught to read! So my Lord grows bored, and proposes to fling us all into the gutter and to find a new pleasure for himself." She looked away from Seaford to where Whitmore was leaning against the wall, white and shaking, a passion of frightened appeal in his eyes; and her voice softened for a moment: "See, he's ashamed of himself for the moment; but what good will his shame do me and my children when we are selling matches down Edgeware Road, and the police arrest us for begging?"

Dead silence succeeded the torrent of passionate words. A bird began to sing in one of the trees of Chelsea Embankment; a little child walked along the pathway underneath the house, crooning songs to itself; while on the terrace above it two human souls, scorched by the fires of retribution, looked out at one another cower-

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ing, helpless, mad with pain and terror. Then Lord Seaford's smooth speech interposed itself between them, and the two souls felt that they had avoided collision with one another by running into an iceberg.

"I don't want to be unjust or unsympathetic," said the Marquis to Cora; and spoken in such a voice the words sounded like the swish of a threatening whip; "but you must have known that Lord Whitmore, like most other men, would want to end this—this connection with you sometime; and also that he's not in the least likely to let you starve, as you suggest."

"He was going abroad to-night," said the woman sullenly, "and not coming back for a year or more."

"I was not!" Whitmore raised his head for a moment and jerked out the words in a hoarse whisper.

"The immediate point is," said Lord Seaford yet more smoothly, so that the threat in his voice might have scared half a dozen strong men, "that we cannot possibly continue this discussion now. If I pledge my word, my dear madam, that Lord Whitmore shall come to your house this afternoon and see you for as long as you desire, will you go now?"

Cora laughed quietly, shrinking a little from the cold eyes which were turned enquiringly on her, and moving a few steps towards the terrace windows. "I understand, of course, that it



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would outrage the eyes of Miss Pamela Carstone to rest on me, just as it outraged the little child who was here, when my fingers touched her shoulder. Just think of the escape she had, my Lord Marquis—that little thing who was there just now! In one more moment, if she would have stood still, I should have kissed her! Think of the pollution of it! She is the living image of a little one of my own, whom I left when I left my husband for Lord Whitmore, and in another moment I should have put my arms round her and kissed her—I whose arms and lips touch only bastards now! . . . Oh, yes, I'll go, if you'll undertake that he shall come and make some arrangement to keep me from starvation. But he shall pay for this, and you too, and all his friends. We are told, I believe, to leave vengeance to the higher powers, but I'll take the job off their hands if I get the chance."

With nervous backward glances at the two men, Cora walked into the inner room, at the door of which she found the alert Prescott waiting for her. Laughing bitterly at the precaution, and yet with a look on her face, and quick glances right and left, which hinted that her movements would be a trifle uncertain if a chance of a row presented itself, she crossed the hall to the front door, got into a waiting cab, and drove away.

Left alone together the two men stood in si-

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lence for a moment; then Seaford shrugged his shoulders and turned towards a window.

"You should go racing more," he said abruptly, "if you stick to the turf it keeps you out of mischief."

There was another pause; Seaford moving restlessly to and fro, the young man leaning against the wall, seemingly incapable of speech or motion. Then suddenly, as if some spark of thought had fired a great mass of passion and agony, Whitmore ran forward and clutched Lord Seaford's arm.

"Oh, Seaford, save me if you can! I love Pamela! I love her! And what would she say if she heard of this woman and the others?"

"I don't know," said the other gravely; "or perhaps I do. Pamela Carstone is a very proud young person. She'd take it very hardly."

"I know, I know!" The misery on the young man's face was dreadful to look at. "I'm not fit to lace her shoes, and—and—I love her! That's the beginning and end of my story, and it's all that matters to me in the world! Can you save me?"

Seaford turned away, his face quivering with such love and pity as no woman's tears or cries of pain had ever brought there in a lifetime. "Julian, I'm no prig nor preacher nor Puritan," he said slowly; "God knows my life's a model for no man; I wonder sometimes whether there's a single hour of it which would pass muster be-

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fore the most merciful judge who ever sat on a judgment seat in this world or the next. I wouldn't dare to throw a stone at a man who broke all the ten commandments every day, and wrote ten more for the purpose of breaking them every night. But, my lad, you see me at a stick here. Pamela's my friend too."

"I love her!" was the stammering, half-incoherent reply. "I'm in a quagmire of debt and knavery and women's entanglements and book-makers' plots; and in the middle of them all I can think of nothing and care for nothing except Pamela!"

"You tell me all these things," said the other with ever-deepening gravity, "and you don't understand that it may be my duty to guard her from you."

"I would wipe the slate clean first at any cost." Whitmore moved back again and leant against the wall, trembling and staring at his companion as if the latter's attitude were a new and dreadful shock. "And she would keep me straight for the rest of my life."

"I am behind the times, or maybe in front of them, but I never could see that it was a woman's business to act as a man's saviour or policeman or relieving officer."

"If she would have me I would change altogether," cried Whitmore, his face and body and very voice seeming to writhe under the torture of Seaford's unexpected words: "Have you

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never been in love with anyone? Man! Man! Don't you know that you fall into it as one person and come out another; that you fall in love perchance a coward, a weak-minded, idle profligate, a selfish crank, and come out of it clean, strong, brave, as a dead man shall come out of his grave on the Resurrection morning!"

"Does the first change always last for eternity, like the other one you speak of?"

Whitmore drew himself up and for the first time that day a little flash of real resolution was in his eyes. "With me it shall," he said quietly. "And if I lose her, my life shall go with the loss. I have a score of rivals who would make use of any chance like this against me. Stanier's in love with her!"

"Yes," the Marquis nodded assent; "Stanier's in love with her."

"And he's a better man than I am," Whitmore went on, in a bitter tone which only half invited contradiction.

"Yes," the Marquis again assented; "he's a better man than you are."

"He was educated properly, I suppose," said Whitmore, more openly inviting pity; "and heard something else talked of besides race horses and roulette when he was young; and met a decent woman now and then, and learnt or inherited some other faith than the duty of amusing one's self from one's nursery to one's grave."

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"Yes." The assenting voice seemed almost to annihilate Lord Whitmore, and he fairly cowered under it now. "A man has an unfair advantage over his neighbours when he's born with a desire to do his duty, I grant you all that. But, Julian, look at the choice between me now—am I to serve you or Pamela?"

Whitmore could bear it no longer, apparently, and moved unsteadily towards the window. "I see," he said; "you have given me up. You're quite right. I'm not worth saving."

Watching his young protégé with grave, doubting eyes, Seaford saw him gasp now, and start back, and look round in terror for means of escape. Pamela Carstone came and stood in one of the windows, and glanced in astonishment from one man to the other.

"Lady Arlington wants to know what on earth you are both doing up here," said the young lady, and looked as if she shared her hostess's wonder to its fullest extent. "Aren't you coming back to lunch?"

"We are coming now. Go on in front, Julian." Seaford put a hand on Pamela's shoulder and looked steadily at her, while Whitmore moved unsteadily away. "Tell me, my dear, quite seriously; I am very serious now; do you care for him?"

There was a moment's pause; then Pamela sat down on a bench, and turned her face away,

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and put up a protesting hand. "Yes, yes, yes! Oh, you know that."

The Marquis of Seaford folded his arms, walked away to the end of the terrace, walked back again to bend over Pamela for a moment with a consoling hand on her shoulder, and walked away again, his hands dropping helplessly by his side. "Yes, I know that," he muttered harshly. "And I am his friend, and yours; and—and—I am one of the men who has taught him his life's lessons, and given him his present faiths, and shown him the path to the place where he stands this morning. God help him! God forgive me!"

## CHAPTER V

**R**EADING one day a novel of Ouida's in which the hero has a room in his London house wherein no one is allowed to enter on any pretext whatever without an invitation, Lady Arlington adopted the idea enthusiastically, and arranged a boudoir for herself on similar lines. She found it slightly troublesome when for a few days in succession she forgot to invite the housemaid to dust the room and lay the fire; but otherwise it was a brilliant success. When a favoured guest was sitting with her in here, the drawing-room and indeed the whole house might be full of other visitors, or persons with whom she had made appointments, and no servant dared to come and tell her of them; a meal might be ready, the carriage waiting, or a message come to announce a royal call, and no one ventured to give her the news.

She was seated in this room now, with the Mother Superior of the Convent of the Ursulines of Bath seated on the sofa by her side, and little Biddy Gilmour sitting near by. The nun was a woman to whom Providence had been singularly unkind, afflicting her with a mouth and eyes which no training nor resolution could make austere or even moderately sober. They laughed

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incessantly, sympathised with all mankind and would see nothing but good in anything.

"Dear Mother, now you've come to spend the day with us at last after all these weeks of entreaty on my part, I feel quite alarmed. What will you think of Biddy and me, and all our pomp and glory!"

"I shall be as confused by it," said the Mother; and here one of the secrets of her influence over her fellows disclosed itself, for her voice was like a soft silver bell ringing low in one's ears, and never going on long enough. "As Biddy was when she first encountered it in French. Do you remember, little one,"—she turned her laughing eyes to the child—"do you remember when you had to renounce the devil '*avec ses pompes et ses gloires*,' and a nervous small voice was heard repeating: '*Je renonce au Satan avec ses pommes et set poires*'?"

"Quite right, Biddy," laughed my Lady. "Never give yourself away by asking questions if you have an off-chance of finding the thing out for yourself. They tell me that when I first went to the Sacré Coeur in Paris I was dreadfully puzzled when the nuns came into our bedroom in the morning and began their morning salutations of '*Sacre Coeur de Jesus; Coeur de Marie*', and the children all answered: '*Je vous donne mon coeur*.' I heard it vaguely, and less vaguely every morning, but wouldn't ask any questions. At last I thought I'd got it right,



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and I am told that one morning a very small nervous voice, like yours, was heard answering from my bed: '*Je vous donne mon queue.*'"

The Mother laughed gaily; but apparently she had something to say, and a moment later put her hand on Biddy's shoulder, and asked with some little emphasis: "What's my favourite pupil doing here?"

"No great harm, Mother," said Lady Arlington, in a tone as if she were pleading for permission to keep her new secretary. "I keep a high spiky wall round persons of this sort when they are in my charge. No one looks over the wall without my permission; not Seaford himself."

"Oh, is he here? Will he be here this afternoon?" The Mother looked round with a contented smile. "He's a dreadful stumbling-block to me. I ought to be offended, horrified, miserable at everything he says or does; and yet—I'm not! It's terrible to think of how he wastes three-quarters of his income, but I know something of how he spends the other quarter, and that stays in my mind, as I think it will stay in the mind of a greater Judge, when the other story is being told against him. His talk is all worldly, sinful and sometimes painfully emphatic; but, Heaven forgive me, I laugh at it helplessly!"

"He's very sad just now, Mother," said Lady Arlington; "you must console him, if you can. He has lost dreadful sums of money, and he's

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going to lose lots more next week—Ascot week, you know.”

“Is he? How silly of him not to give it to us instead! But how can you tell?”

Lady Arlington laughed: “Well, I don’t exactly know.”

“I do,” said the secretary’s small voice; “I’ll tell you something—something that isn’t at all nice. In the Park yesterday afternoon I heard Sir Francis laughing about The Druid, Lord Seaford’s horse, which is going to win the Hunt Cup, you know; and he said that Lord Seaford would have half his fortune on it, but The Druid would be beaten.”

Lady Arlington opened her lips to speak, but checked herself for a moment till she could mitigate the startled annoyance in her voice. “To whom was he talking?” she asked at last, quietly.

“To Lord Whitmore.” Biddy’s elaborately placid voice intimated that she was perfectly aware of all that the question and answer meant.

“And what did Whitmore say?”

“Nothing.” Again the young voice gave its full meaning to the reply.

“It is certainly not,” said Lady Arlington drily, “a very nice tale. Sir Francis Anstruther,” she went on, turning to the Mother Superior, “is the villain of half the dramas which are played on the turf to-day. I should like to

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know why, in this case, he was taking the hero's best friend into his confidence."

"Tell Lord Seaford not to back his horse," said the Mother Superior, whose knowledge of racing business, as of most other worldly matters, was improperly large.

"Much he'd care for my telling him that," laughed Lady Arlington.

"I know what I'm going to do," said Biddy in a quietly business-like voice. "I thought of it in bed last night. I'm going to dress up as a gipsy, and meet him at Ascot, and give him a mysterious warning."

"Upon my word, child," said Lady Arlington, with a vexed smile, "I believe it's the only kind of advice on earth that he'd pay the slightest attention to. Dreams and fortune-tellers rule half his life."

"It's a most improper scheme," said the Mother Superior austerely, "and I'm pained to hear a little pupil of mine suggest it; but . . . while you're about it, why don't you warn him to keep away from Ascot altogether?"

"One must be practical," said Biddy; "that's trying for too much."

"Likewise it occurs to me to wonder," said the nun, controlling her laughter by an effort, "whether Lord Seaford would not be seriously angry if he found it out. Such vigorous interference in his affairs by a young person, even with all the worldly knowledge of seventeen

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years in her head, might make him feel rather small."

"Can a man," said Biddy placidly threading her needle, "ever be made to feel small for long by a girl or woman? At the end of it all he just says to himself 'I'm a man,' and seems to find some consolation in that, like a baby sucking its thumb."

The Mother Superior turned half round on the sofa, folded her hands on her knees and took a long look at the speaker. The round childish face, bent over an extremely badly executed piece of totally useless needlework, had been a favourite of hers ever since she first encountered it, tearful and distracted by its first abandonment to the mercies of an unknown school, ten years ago. It had been the fashion to say throughout those years that Biddy Gilmour would always be pleasant-looking, sympathetic, and popular in a mild kind of way, though she could never hope to be called pretty or clever. What singularly bad judges they had been at the Convent, thought the Mother Superior an hour later, as she was brought into the great drawing-room, and the London world streamed in to pay its respects to one of the most famous and popular of its rulers, and she was introduced to this well-known man and that great lady. Her eyes wandered back again and again to Lady Arlington and Biddy, and she said to herself that the Bath Convent might be proud of its work. Pres-

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ently, talking to the child, she saw a look in her eyes of which even the superiors of convents must perforce know the meaning, and then found herself being presented to Mr. Richard Trent, chaplain of Beddowes, and being invited to come for an evening stroll with the pair along the river banks, when the other guests had gone. She accepted joyfully and hoped those others would go quickly. The masks, the elaborate wit and exquisitely planned colours interested her, but she preferred human life.

On the main stream of the Amazon you fly by on fast steamers, you pass boats bringing turtles from Ega, timber from Madeira forests, india-rubber from all parts to Para. You stop at Macapa, Santarem, Manaus, drive bargains in india-rubber, exchange hasty remedies for mosquito bites, and then hurry along on your voyage to St. Paolo. The river is wide and busy, and every passer-by is out of sight before you have finished nodding to him. But on the backwaters you rest and think and really feel your own emotions, and know the true value of everything. Sitting under a tree two hundred feet high, fifty feet round, and one thousand years old, in a forest three thousand miles long and five hundred miles across, you see what it really means to be something over five feet high and to live for four-score years. All round you nature is developing herself riotously. The forest glades are a vast fernery; orchids and lianas hang from the great Assai palms;

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scarlet and green tanagers, red and yellow macaws, and bright-coloured butterflies flit to and fro; down the slow-moving stream floats a great boa-constrictor, curled round the branch of a tree which he steers with his tail; big pumice-stones, which have been made round as balls by rolling about in the shallow streams at the foot of the Andes volcanoes, drift ashore bearing eggs and seeds of insects and plants from twelve hundred miles away, which are seized upon and propagated in a thousand variations by the insects and plants round you. Sitting in the midst of this lavish life you see that you are but a small not especially important part of it all. You can, it is true, pick the orchids, shoot the parrots and trample down the ferns; but in like fashion the snake which is hanging from a branch of a neighbouring tree, looking out for something to eat, will probably shortly make you feel equally small. And do seeds travel a thousand miles to unite with others in producing you? You are not so very wonderful, after all . . . The truth and reality of life are only seen in life's backwaters.

There was a backwater at Chelsea on the banks of which Mr. Richard Trent and Miss Biddy Gilmour wandered, and saw clearly that money-making and smart frocks and Ascot were so small a bit of life as hardly to be worth calling life at all, and that love mattered everything. Anon Mr. Trent meditated alone on this discov-

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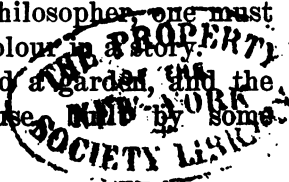
ery, and anon he told the story of his love to an audience of one. I do not mean to suggest that he had ever said to Biddy in words "I love you, please marry me," being fearful lest the answer might put an end to his present state of bliss; but he said it in a thousand other ways. Indeed when eyes and mute lips can tell tales so much more clearly than words, it hath always seemed to me remarkable that parents and guardians should attach so much importance to the escape of such second-rate messengers. "Will you give me your promise, if I let you remain here, not to speak to my daughter about this matter for another two years . . ." Oh, foolish father, to think such a pledge, when given, worth twopence, when the man that very morning will look such love and hope and longing into his mistress's eyes as no words nor kisses nor diamond engagement rings could tell of!

Trent was the eldest son of a parson in the Midlands, and himself held a fairly comfortable living at Lady Arlington's country place in Berkshire. He was a contented, easy-going person, with the deep-rooted refinement and general lack of education common to all men who have wasted eight years of their life at Eton and Oxford; satisfied with life (except when Biddy was angry); unsuspecting of any man or woman who was not habited in the garb of an Adelphi villain; well-groomed in body, and clean of mind. It is curious—even, perhaps, humiliating to the male

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mind—to reflect upon the number of men in the world like Trent, waiting to be sent to heaven or to the devil, with half a dozen or half a hundred or half a million souls in their train, at the whim or beckoning of some Biddy Gilmour whom fate has tossed into their path. Since a man may be a caterpillar by himself, and a deity when a woman joins him, it is surely the first duty of any reasonably managed State to arrange for a judicious marriage of its component parts. The girl watched her admirer with a little bewilderment (for he was her first lover), a little wonder and doubt, sometimes with a touch of amusement (for it is a painful law of nature that in such business a man should look silly and the girl adorable), and now and then with just a little inclination to return his love with interest . . . It is only in the backwaters, you know, that two lives like these can be watched drifting down stream, and coming nearer and nearer together as they sweep along. I do not suppose that their story—it is so old—is really very interesting. It is stale, is it not, this history of first love, this book of innocence written in white on white? But we will get back soon to the main stream. After all, however much more interesting and real the tranquillity of the backwater may be to the philosopher, one must have hurry and noise and colour in a story.

The house at Chelsea had a garden, and the garden had a summerhouse, and some





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friendly architect who knew that people occasionally had things to say to one another which entail sitting close together, touching one's companion's hand, and other actions which cannot be carried out in view of the drawing-room windows. On a bench in this summerhouse now sat Trent and Biddy, while the Mother Superior who came there with them had had an intuitive certainty that Lady Arlington wished to speak to her while dressing for dinner. One knows not how such convictions come to the superiors of convents.

"Do you like Lord Seaford, Miss Gilmour?" They had not yet reached the stage of Christian names, even in the summerhouse, though now and then Trent slipped out a "Biddy" and pretended to look very much annoyed by his mistake.

"Yes, very much, indeed," said Biddy enthusiastically.

"Oh, do you, really?" It is so difficult to know for certain at what a lover will and will not take offence! Biddy did not know, and having expressed this cordial approval of a man who liked Trent thoroughly, sat for a moment wondering why her companion should suddenly move away from her side and speak in this resentful voice. She stood up and wandered to the front of the summerhouse; and Trent, having sulked for some thirty or forty seconds, came and stood as close as he dared by her side, foolishly happy because she looked at him with a little welcom-

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ing smile, and because he must hold her hand in his—for nearly a minute perhaps if he could talk on and make her forget, when he went. How such evenings hang in the memory when a hundred great triumphs are forgotten! You see, the life of the backwaters, being real, lives on.

“Biddy . . . ?”

The girl stood quite still with her eyes on the ground, and a soft flush like the reflection of some pale pink light on her cheeks, while Trent held her hand, and could find no further words, nor think of anything except that he loved her, and was apparently to be allowed now to put his arms round her and tell her so, with the childish lips close to his, ready to be kissed when the tale was told . . .

Such an old dull story!—as old as the sunset which just now was painting the western clouds with summer pink and gold; as old as the far-off Surrey hills which to-morrow’s sunrise would tinge with primrose and rose; as dull as the little backwater where only the leaves rustle, and the water sweeps past bending reeds, and the air sings with the beating of birds’ wings! Yet it is a page in the life of one of the heroines of this story, and must be duly told; the tale being, I suppose, more complete than it sounds. Biddy at any rate announced shyly to several people during the next few days that she was engaged to be married to Trent; though my impression is that he had said nothing more to her in that summerhouse than what is recorded here.

## CHAPTER VI

**W**HO calls the road to hell a pleasant one? Someone who has never been along it! There's no mile of it that hasn't been long, dull weariness to me, no stone on it that hasn't lamed me as I passed . . . And Jim would take me back if it wasn't for Whitmore's two brats . . . Oh, thank God, Nancy's gone where she can't hear of it all!"

Cora Acland was strolling through a wood which skirted the park of Beddowes, the Countess of Arlington's place two miles from Ascot. It was the Monday in Ascot race-week, and Cora had come down to some lodgings in the neighbourhood, coming here merely because she had done so every year, and it seemed less trouble nowadays to follow routines than to change it. Her life was over, she told herself; nothing mattered; nobody cared. She could shame or scare Lord Whitmore sooner or later, she concluded, into settling some money on her and on his two children, and then she must go and live an idle, listless life, with women of her own kind for companions, and no part nor lot in the quiet, happy, home life and struggles and joy of the wives and mothers whom she had once known. The two children would be with her, she sup-

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posed—the two persons whom, whenever a spasm of real feeling came back for a short time into her languid, uninterested mind, she loathed and hated more passionately than she had ever hated anybody in the world, except their father; but otherwise she would be alone. Servants and tradesmen all knew her position, and she detested speaking to them; an elder sister came to see her sometimes and preached repentance, and Cora hated her too. Her mind was indifferent to everything on earth for most of the day and night, but it awoke now and then to a seething, boiling passion of rage against all the world.

She was in her most listless mood now. With tired, indifferent eyes she looked up the great bank by her side, glowing blue with its thick carpet of hyacinths, the June sunlight striking down in patches through the stems of silver birches and young green firs. The scene vexed her; it reminded her suddenly and horribly of a day in some Staffordshire woods, where she had been with her husband and Nancy. She walked on quickly, coming at last to the head of a little valley where three men were standing talking; and she caught her own name.

The men were the money-lender, Levi Randall, a bookmaker named Knight, and a Newmarket trainer of the name of Mercer; and Cora Acland scowled furiously as she caught sight of the last-mentioned person's face. This man, whose son she had married years ago, presumed now some-

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times to pity her and even occasionally to offer her help.

"It's a bore having women mixed up in affairs of this sort," Mercer was saying. "You never know whether they'll split on you or not."

"That's a fact." Randall raised his hat for the purpose of mopping his forehead, but looked as if he were raising it in salutation of a great truth. "Or rather, you do know they'll tell someone, and must take your chance whether that person will be the most tiresome of the whole crowd."

"Cora won't blab," said the bookmaker, Knight; and it was this reference to herself which had fallen on Cora Acland's ears. "She's too keen on making young Whitmore smart for leaving her. She won't tell her dearest friend much, and she's the sort of woman who in a really desperate emergency could hold her tongue altogether."

"I'm sorry for her, you know," said Mercer, in a tone which suggested wide generous forgiveness, and a desire that everybody should know of this amiable weakness on his part. "She was fond of that scamp of a son of mine when she married him, and she loved Nancy—you remember that kid of theirs, don't you, Randall? Cora tried to take the poor little imp with her when she went off and set up with Whitmore, but of course we fetched it back. I'd have left it alone myself. My son didn't want it, and the creature

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fretted for two or three years till it died. Cora came and made an awful scene with us when she heard of it, and they say she's led Whitmore a dog's life ever since."

"Well, well," said Randall, "it's rough on her to get left like this; without even a few hundreds a year, they tell me, to console herself with."

"Whitmore would pay," said the ever-practical Knight, "if he had the money."

Animated with a vague desire to tear someone's eyes out, Miss Acland ran down into the valley and stood before her father-in-law and his two companions. "What are you three doing here?" she demanded. "Is it Lord Whitmore you're talking about? Is it anything to do with him?"

"Yes, my girl," said Randall consolingly. "Something to make him sit up and howl."

Cora drew herself up and moved a few steps away from the man, surveying them with angry disgust. "I don't want to know anything about your scheme," she said wrathfully; then she came a few steps nearer to the three, and muttered angrily: "Yet I may as well be told. You know all about my private affairs apparently. What mischief are you doing to Lord Whitmore, and why?"

"We are not especially interested in him for himself," said Randall, with an uneasy smile. He had been studying Cora's face, and was alarmed to notice how few lines of retreat were

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open from this valley; "but one of his horses is going to do us a good turn without his knowing it. Mercer here's got an awfully smart three-year-old of his which has just been christened Pamela."

An exclamation of pain came from the girl.

"Has it?" she asked, turning away; "he told me last year . . . never mind, go on."

"It's good enough to beat The Druid," Randall went on obediently, "Lord Seaford's horse, and it's going to win the Hunt Cup here on Wednesday. Whitmore's only come back from Paris today; he won't even hear that the beast's running till a few hours before the race, and Mercer is going to tell him that Pamela is only running here as a final training gallop before she runs at Newcastle, and that she has no chance of winning. But you go, my girl, and raise every farthing you can lay hands on, and put it all on Pamela. She'll spread-eagle the field from start to finish, and win in a trot."

"Won't the Marquis take it rather hardly?" asked Cora, forgetting personal matters for a moment in her deep inherited interest in a turf "ramp." "They tell me at the Hotel here that he's going to have one of his biggest plunges on The Druid."

"Yes, it will upset him a bit," said Randall, with a chuckle. "He and I will call quits over that old score. Likely, you don't remember how he got my son warned off the turf. And when

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the thing's done by a horse of Lord Whitmore's, which Whitmore himself has just said can't possibly win," added Randall laughing broadly, "the Marquis will about beat all his old records in the way of cursing."

Cora wandered a few steps away, then came back and stood in front of Mercer, with a look of doubt and calculation in her eyes. "Yet if Whitmore won anything," she muttered to the trainer, "he'd have a few shillings to give me. What's the sense of that part?"

"If he knew enough about the filly to back her, he'd tell the Marquis about it. I suppose?" Knight suggested.

There was another brief pause; Randall and Knight holding distinctly that silence consorted best with their personal safety, and Mercer being engaged in some calculations. "I'll tell you what I'll do," said Mercer at last; "Whitmore gives me a certain amount of license to put bits of money on his horses for him at the last minute if I think it's good enough. I'll do that now, and say I didn't know he was coming back from Paris in time, and that I knew he never liked his horses to run loose. It'll sound a bit thin, but when a man wins money he does not ask too many questions about how it's been done."

Cora laughed grimly. "It won't improve his explanation to Lord Seaford afterwards if he has to admit that he's won money over the race."

"No, my girl," said Mercer, in the tone of



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good-humoured consolation which always drove Cora to frenzy; "I told you there'd be some howling when the business was over. This'll about ruin the Marquis, and your friend Whitmore will be responsible."

"And the horse that does it is called Pamela," added Knight in genial, momentary forgetfulness of caution. "That should tickle your fancy, too, miss."

The girl flung up her hands and turned on the three men with a scream of rage. "Will you stop discussing my private affairs in this fashion! Insolence! If I'm the talk of all the betting clubs and public houses in the Strand, I decline to be told what they say. How dare you speak to me about Lord Whitmore! How dare you tell me your impudent plots against—against—friends of mine in this fashion! If you're not all three out of my sight in one minute I'll go straight to Lord Seaford."

Cora flung herself down on a tree trunk, gasping, sobbing, muttering execrations, while Randall and Knight began a hasty retreat. Mercer watched her for a moment with frightened pity and then joined them.

"Blame it all, why did she do like that?" suddenly asked Knight, mopping his forehead. "Damn it, how they can scare a man!"

"Ah, they're like the tigers shut up at the Zoo," said Mercer sympathetically; "they feel it now and then, and it makes 'em wild."

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As the footsteps of the three men died away Cora looked up, rose from her seat and peered through the trees at a sight which sent the hot blood singing to her ears and forehead and cheeks. By the road opposite to that which the three men had taken Pamela Carstone was strolling down into the valley. The woman moved toward the little bridge, with what object she scarcely knew; and stood there looking about her uncertainly as Pamela came towards her.

"Have you lost your way?" asked the girl politely, but in a tone of such surprise that Cora collected her wits with an effort and tried to look less distracted.

"I think I have. They told me this was a short cut into the Ascot Road, but I seem to be in a private park."

"It is a short cut, straight through the wood there," Pamela answered; "but still it is rather a long way to Ascot, and you look tired. This bridge makes a comfortable seat. Are you staying at Ascot for the races?"

"No," said the other wearily, "I've come down with a friend on less amusing business."

"I should think," Pamela went on, speaking partly because the woman was blocking her way across the bridge, partly because she had a vague uncomfortable feeling that this person was not unknown to her and that she was here to say something, "I should think you'd find it difficult to make anyone in this neighbourhood attend to

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any other business but racing for the next few days."

Cora looked steadily at the beautiful girl before her, carefully and deliberately taking in every detail of the lovely face and young graceful figure. She stared steadily on till she saw a little flush of annoyance and alarm mount on Pamela's face, then answered briefly: "My friend's business will absorb the attention of the person concerned to the exclusion of racing matters. But her story would not interest you."

"Oh, I love any story! . . . Why, what's the matter? This gentleman coming along is only a friend of mine who stayed behind to pick me some hyacinths. Come here, Whitmore; I've just met this lady, and she was going to tell me a story about herself."

"Oh, I don't think it would interest you." Cora leant down over the brook, dabbling her hand in the water for a moment; then looked up again and met the man's eyes, flashing threats and appeals, with a long cold stare.

"Yes, yes, please tell me." There was polite but very decided insistence in the young voice. The girl's whole instinct was crying danger, and telling her of the passions which were at work near her behind these two human masks, and she meant to get some clue to its meaning.

Cora sat down on a wall of the little bridge, and wound and unwound on her fingers a piece

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of water weed which she had picked out of the stream. "It is a dull, sordid, commonplace little tale," she said slowly. "My friend has been deserted by her lover and she wants revenge. She wants money badly, but she wants revenge more. The lover is going to marry someone else, and my friend will probably tell that girl her story. I wonder whether the girl will marry him afterwards."

"I should think not, indeed!" said Pamela, with fear and dislike in her face. "How can you think such things?"

Cora looked at her fixedly, holding Pamela's frightened eyes with her own till she finished speaking. "The man is young, handsome, witty, charming," she said; "and he is genuinely tired of my friend. Perhaps he is honestly sorry for having ruined her, and quite willing to make commonplace amends for what he has done. He will give her money; settle money on her two children; give the poor little wretches a helping hand in the world, perhaps, if they want it, and if it can be done quietly. Yet you don't think this other girl would marry him, if she knew?"

"Most certainly not." Pamela drew back towards Whitmore, who put a hand on her arm. Together they stood regarding Cora, the man with set, deadly white face, the girl with vexed, scared eyes. "Of course not. I—I don't think I want to hear any more of your story," said

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Pamela. "Forgive me for having asked about it. I—I don't like such stories."

Miss Acland moved abruptly away from the bridge and walked a few steps up the road. "They are not pretty," she said, turning her head for a moment with a fine faint smile. "I love no stories myself; they are all too old and stale. Even in fairy stories men and women are turned into beasts, and that's not very new to me. Good-bye."

As the woman disappeared round a bend in the road Whitmore put an arm round the shaking figure of his sweetheart, and looked into her face with dreadful anxiety. He wondered at the fear in her eyes. Could she possibly have guessed what truth underlay Cora's story?

"She has frightened me," whispered Pamela, clinging to her lover, only half conscious of what she was doing; "she has frightened me terribly!"

"Why, dear? It's only some ordinary Ascot visitor. What has she to do with you?"

"She—she stared at me so oddly. She looked like a witch. I don't believe she was real."

"She seemed to me quite real," said Whitmore, wondering whether his rueful tone was as audible to Pamela as it was to himself. "If she was a witch, sweetheart," he went on, holding the young figure closer to himself, "and could tell the future, would it have any happiness for me?"

"What must you have to be happy?" whis-

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pered the girl in reply, but in the tone of a person who was fighting to evade a question, not to encourage more.

"Only one thing; but it is a gift so great that fate might well mock me for asking it. Who would dare to ask for . . . to ask for . . . your love, except humbly on his knees, and hoping at most that the refusal may have some kindly pity in it?"

"Oh, Julian, I . . ."

"Well, beloved?"

"Oh, Julian, I—I—am frightened. That woman has frightened me. I can't answer now. I can't think. Please let me wait and think about it."

"Mayn't I have a word of hope? Every minute of the waiting will be such long years—such dreadful years with a ray of faith now and then, and all the rest black despair! Mayn't I have a word of hope?"

The girl shrank away, with a half-wild look round her. The whole valley seemed to be haunted by the baleful face and threatening voice of the woman who had just left it.

"Let me wait! Give me time to think," she repeated.

For another moment Whitmore took the unwilling hand. "Tell me one word," he said despairingly, "do you care for me at all?"

"Yes . . . yes . . . yes." Pamela snatched away her hand just as a man's voice

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fell on the strange silence which seemed to have filled the valley since Cora Acland left it. More footsteps were coming down the road from the Hall, and presently Seaford and Lady Arlington came into sight. Apparently they had been amused by something they had just seen, for Seaford was laughing and saying half-seriously, half-jestingly, to his companion: "Poor Stanier really must be rescued somehow. I never saw such a look of abject despair on a man's face in my life."

Lady Arlington laughed consolingly, with a backward glance to the wood which they had just left. "Lady Carstone appears only to be pointing out to him the beauties of nature with some eloquence."

"No, no," said Seaford, "a man wouldn't drown himself for that; and there was suicide on Stanier's face."

Lady Arlington caught sight suddenly of Whitmore and Pamela and stopped short with an interjection of surprise—by no means pleased surprise. "Here's a rescue party," she said, studying the young man with disfavour. "Will you run back, Whitmore, and bring Lady Carstone and Sir Norman here? Tell them a boat's coming here at half past four to row us to the Island for tea. Oh . . . are you both going?"

Seaford looked after the retreating couple and stroked his beard in bachelor meditation, full of

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sudden fancies. "Do you know, those two young people look to me very much as if they had been coming to terms?"

"Oh, I do hope not," said the woman anxiously, having of course seen the fact at the first moment when she entered the valley. "At any rate, I hope they are to be quite distant terms, not to say bad ones, not to say what Biddy calls 'spitting-terms.'"

"Ah." Seaford settled himself down on the wall of the bridge, crossed his legs, rested his hands on his stick and prepared to give battle. "You are going to take it like that, are you? You've asked Stanier here, I should guess, as a counter-attraction, and think he's skulking improperly just now?"

"The idea had crossed my mind."

"You're right, Dolly; you're as cool and practical and sensible as usual."

"Shall you take it hardly," asked Lady Arlington, her restless fingers and nervous eyes contradicting the airy lightness of her voice, "if I banish your young protégé Whitmore from Pamela's life altogether . . . if I can? His qualifications for matrimony are not glaringly numerous."

"He spends his life," Seaford admitted, "considering how to spend money, and he's a person of large imagination. I did the same at his age. And I'll remind you of something which you know well. If the Pamela of my young days—



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you remember who she was—had been a little kinder, and married me, I shouldn't be standing here wondering what idle folly I could devise to pass the rest of this year."

"Some guardians intervened, didn't they?" asked the woman, in a soft whisper.

Seaford shook his head. "I never believed that story."

"No?" My Lady paused, looked across the lake with the summer afternoon sunlight glowing over its islands and pale water, and added suddenly: "Do you know, I have a mind after all these years to tell you the truth? It might help you to read Pamela's story. The girls who fall in love with a man because he has a great halo about him of gambling, fighting, divorce court adventures, and reckless flinging about of money, are much fewer than the novels of which they are the heroines. It's very exciting to waltz with a man of that sort, and sit next to him at dinner, and meet him at a country house party, and wonder what he will do next. One may even like him very much. I liked you awfully, Harry. But you know, girls of eighteen and nineteen aren't now and never have been fools; and they would no more have married you, my dear old boy, than they'd have married an earthquake."

"And you think Pamela is one of these eminently reasonable young women?"

"I think she's very fond of Whitmore," ad-

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mitted Lady Arlington grudgingly; "but what she knows of him puzzles her, and what she doesn't know frightens her."

"But," said the other in triumphant objection, "what she knows of your man Stanier bores her."

"Not now," was the decided answer; "within the last few days, since she has known him, she has begun to like him."

Seaford rapped the bridge impatiently and dogmatically with his walking stick. "Pamela's more in love with Whitmore than you think," he said.

Lady Arlington studied her companion cautiously out of the corner of her eye, and perceived with the troublesome acuteness of her sex that he was at least as anxious to convince himself of the truth of this statement as to persuade her. "I daresay," she said; "but, Harry, if you call yourself Pamela's friend, as well as Whitmore's, you must think more of her, and be more just to a rival like Stanier, who's a better man than yours."

"I'll try, but"—Seaford writhed impatiently—"he's such a stick-in-the-mud sort of person! He won't move anywhere in action or in thought. It would want a couple of stalwart warders to turn him out of a moderately comfortable prison if he had 'done' six months there; and if he'd been alive on the day of creation, he'd have begged the Creator to leave

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chaos alone, because it had gone on very comfortably up till then."

"Oh," laughed my Lady Arlington, "what a merciful person to live with when one is surrounded by people like you and Whitmore! I wish he'd marry me!"

For a moment complete silence reigned in the little valley, save that the stream bubbled on in soft endless rhythm and some doves cooed quietly in the young tree-tops near by. "There is one thing you haven't thought of, Dolly,—a big thing." Seaford's voice was suddenly very quiet. "If Whitmore reforms?"

The woman's voice dropped to an answering note of gravity. "Yes, there's that. Yes, that would be a big thing. I suppose no woman ever saw a man turn round on himself, and blot all vice and folly and wrong out of his life, and make its crooked places straight so far as he could, and start out on a new journey with honour and ambition and self-sacrifice as companions . . . for her sake . . . without a little quiver of love for him. Will your man do that?"

Seaford nodded gravely. "Yes, I think my man will do that."

"And you are going to pay all his debts,"—Lady Arlington turned on her companion, half-laughing, half-vexed, wholly loving him—"and take over all his mortgages and bad speculations—oh, Harry, I know you so well!—and go and square all his women, and say that they and

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their children belong to you if anybody asks questions about them! Suppose the reformation only lasts for a few months? You can't give up your life to him!"

My Lord Marquis stood up with squared shoulders and solidly planted feet and clear steady eyes looking across the long distances of wood and lake.

"Among all my failings and wrong-doings," he said, with a little ring in his grave voice, which people who heard believed in once and forever, "no man can accuse me of putting my hand to the plough and looking back."

## CHAPTER VII

**P**RESUMABLY Sir Norman Stanier was not very anxious to be rescued from his companion; at any rate it was some time before the pair, followed by Whitmore and Pamela, came down the hill into the Spring Valley. Then Lady Carstone was taken gently but firmly in hand by her hostess and removed to the other end of the valley, Stanier's eyes following her regretfully. When a man or woman has been finally stamped as a bore, and everyone takes for granted that whenever you are seen speaking to him you are mentally entreating the by-standers to come and save you, it is a trifle irritating if the bore has dropped on an interesting subject and the rescue party arrives all the same. Seaford's congratulations on this occasion, for instance, were very ill received by their object.

"I had no desire to be 'saved' from Lady Carstone," said Stanier petulantly. "We were having a very interesting conversation. What she was saying made me rather pleased with fate, and by no means anxious to be saved."

"I think," said Seaford after a significant pause, "I think I would not attach over-much importance to Lady Carstone's conversation. She has so great a command of language—or

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rather language has so great a command of her—that one must not—er—one must not give its full apparent value to every word she says.”

Stanier turned sharply to his companion. “You are aware of the subject of her conversation, perhaps?”

“Perhaps I could guess it.”

“You would suggest . . .” Stanier tried hard to maintain the level expressionless tone in his voice, but a high note of anxiety would creep into it. “You believe that her opinion—her alliance I might almost call it—counts for less than I hope?”

“I would state my very clear opinion,” the Marquis answered, “that her alliance counts for nothing at all.”

Sir Norman walked away a few steps, stood still for a moment, looking across the lake, returned, and stood in front of the other man with cold set face. “Look you, Lord Seaford,” he said sharply, “you are a partisan of your friend, of course, and I like to be quite straight with all honest opponents. How you, who call yourself a friend of Miss Carstone’s, can permit her even to speak to such a man as Lord Whitmore I can’t imagine; but that is your affair. What I want to tell you quite openly is that I do not feel bound to keep silence about any of Lord Whitmore’s misdeeds, nor about anything that you may do to cover them up. Even if I were not in love

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with Miss Carstone,—I am quite frank, you see,—and even if her behaviour to me during the last few days had not encouraged me to think that I had some hope of winning her, I could not look on quietly and see an innocent girl given to a man like your friend. You understand that I shall respect no secrets which I hear deliberately or by chance about Lord Whitmore's actions or yours?"

"I understand." Seaford was watching his companion respectfully and almost pitifully. "I thank you for the warning. You have been perfectly straight with me. But then I should never expect you to be anything else."

"Thank you." Stanier bowed formally.

Seaford hesitated for a moment, and then went on, with his eyes on the ground, and in the nervous tone of a man who must learn the truth, but does not know whether in reply to his question he will be answered fully, invited to mind his own business, or knocked over the head with a stick. "Forgive one question: answer it or insult me for my impertinence just as you please. Are you very serious in your intentions as regards Miss Carstone?"

"It is a—a—curious question, but I have heard enough about you from Lady Carstone this afternoon to admit your right to ask it, and I will answer fully. I have spent forty-five years in absolute indifference to all such matters as we are now talking of. When first I met Miss

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Carstone I conceived a great admiration for her." The man was trying to speak stiffly and formally, but his voice faltered as he went on: "The admiration grew in a fashion which bewildered me somewhat, but it could easily have been checked and banished. Miss Carstone has been very kind to me, however, while I have been here. She has excused my lack of all those compliments and flattery to which she is accustomed; she has forgiven my stiffness and pedantry. Oh, I wish to God I could get rid of them for her sake! And now I—I—only the most homely language can tell the rest of the story. I love her."

"I thank you for answering my question," said the other respectfully. "Miss Carstone is fortunate in her friends."

There were voices among the trees on the other side of the valley, and a group of the Beddowes's guests came laughing down the hill. Some were carrying bunches of hyacinths, and one of them thought it necessary to apologise for this outbreak of rural simplicity.

"The idiotic destruction of flowers," said Lord Carstone in a politely explanatory voice, "is an essential part of living a homely country life. We are living a homely country life, so we have laid waste the whole neighbourhood for a mile round."

With a sudden little cry of excitement Eleanor Hamilton dropped her hyacinths and ran



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towards the stream. "A tip!" she shouted, "a straight tip for the Ascot Stakes to-morrow! Look at these king-cups! I shall back Kingcup, win and place, to-morrow, for all I am worth."

Carstone followed the girl and stooped down and picked one of the glowing yellow flowers. "But suppose a horse in the Duke of Westminster's yellow jacket beats him?" he asked.

Seaford gave a queer little look at Sir Norman's scornful face, and for a moment seemed inclined to sympathise with the contempt expressed thereon. "What a sweet, simple thing country life is when you take it properly," he said in a low voice; and Stanier flashed a glance of smiling gratitude at him. Then a second detachment of guests arrived in the valley, with information which seemed to touch a weak spot in the Marquis.

"I say, we've had such fun," said Jack Hamilton in his loud, cheerful voice. "There's a caravan of gipsies on the edge of the heath over there, and we've all had our fortunes told."

"I've got to beware," said Miss Adeane, "of a dark man with short curly hair; but the silly woman wouldn't say whether it was a jockey or a lover."

"She must have meant Bradford; he's riding Ironsides in the Hunt Cup. I told you Ironsides had no chance of winning," added Carstone, shaking his head gravely.

Lady Arlington came slowly forward till she

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was near Seaford, and spoke to him with a non-chalant smile.

"The gipsies are hanging round the park this evening. Mind you get your fortune told and follow their advice."

"I'll go straight off and look for them now," said the Marquis, ending his sentence with a light laugh which quite failed to banish the effect of his eager speech and excited eyes. "Last time a gipsy told my fortune she said I should win heavily, and I won ninety-five thousand pounds on the week."

"I hope to goodness the old girl's prophecy about me comes off in that fashion. She said I should lose the first day and win the other three. At present"—Jack drew some silver from his pocket and eyed it ruefully—"I've got four and sixpence in the world to last me till Christmas."

Anstruther eyed the young man with contemptuous pity, believing rather more of his statement than he was meant to believe, and having a profound scorn for any man who was not the owner—honestly or dishonestly, but the owner—of a pocket full of loose gold. "Has the long, long patience of your friend Solomon Warner come to an end? I thought he had bills for you at the rate of one a week without murmuring?"

"The dear old scoundrel, so he did," said Jack genially; "but he died last March. I hadn't been near him for three months, so he broke

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something—something necessary to his existence, so it couldn't have been his heart—and died. Do tell me, Lord Seaford, is The Druid a real good thing for Wednesday?"

"In my humble opinion," was the courteous answer, "he is what you young men call a stone-blind certainty for the race. Yet,"—my Lord became suddenly aware that Eleanor Hamilton was still standing by him, consulting the sayings of the running water and dainty June flowers—"Yet this stream may have secrets about the race more profitable than any calculation of weights and distances and training gallops."

"So it may," said the girl, looking eagerly up and down the stream. "Here are some flowering rushes, and plantains, and willow-herbs and irises; have any of those got counterparts running this week?"

"I don't remember anything of that name running," said Jack, puckering his forehead into the grave effort of memory demanded by such a question. Then he looked across the valley and smiled broadly, and moved a step or two nearer to his sister and Miss Adeane. "Here are the lovers," he added.

The two girls looked across the valley and saw Whitmore and Pamela emerge from the trees and walk slowly down the hill. As they came nearer one could see that there was a shade of annoyance on the man's face, and a tinge of pink on the girl's, but they faced the little crowd round

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the stream below them with creditable self-possession. Mr. Hamilton, however, had no leisure to comment further on the advancing pair; his attention was occupied by a muttered exclamation of rage from a man behind him, and by his own not inconsiderable alarm at discovering that Sir Norman Stanier had overheard his last words, and was now moving away with a furious scowl on his face. The brilliant idea had occurred to Mr. Hamilton this morning that with a little skilful management—say, some delicately proffered assistance in the present love business—Sir Norman might be induced to lend him a little money. Philosophers might be tiresome, but were notoriously innocent and gullible persons.

“I say,” he muttered nervously to his sister, “I put my foot in it then. I didn’t mean old Aristotle to hear me.”

“Surely,” said Eleanor consolingly, “he realises that Lord Whitmore’s in love with Pamela too.”

The young man looked round with an amount of serious vexation on his face which quite belied the light tone of his answer. “Unluckily I put ‘lovers’ in the plural. Will there be a duel?”

“Oh, no, he’ll only offer to lend you one of his books.”

“Or row me home this evening in a lonely Canadian canoe, and upset it,” said Jack, be-

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ginning to laugh again. "I should like to see old Aristotle in a boat."

Mr. Hamilton seemed fated to be surrounded by inconvenient listeners this afternoon. Young Lord Carstone overheard the last words. He had been considering various matters during the past two days, and without actually coming to any decision—a proceeding, in fact, of which he had never been guilty with regard to any matter in his life—he wished to be in a position to make prompt and large profit out of any decision which anybody else might happen to make.

"Seeing that Aristotle, as you call him, stroked the Eton Eight at Henley in his day, and the Trinity boat for two years in the Cambridge Eights," he said scornfully to Jack; "and seeing that your last aquatic feat was to run my new outrigger against a landing stage on the broadest part of the river, and smash it to pieces, I'd rather be in Aristotle's boat, and watch you, than vice versa."

"I accept the snub and subside." Jack bowed with mock politeness to the last speaker and then turned to Miss Adeane with a grin. "We are preparing to make the best of Aristotle, apparently. Well, thank goodness, I haven't got to marry him. An amateur jockey is no good to live with, and a raging gambler is a bad nuisance; but they'd be saints and angels compared to a philosopher."

Apparently Eleanor Hamilton felt it her duty

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to side with her lover, for she moved away from her brother's side, and being a young person of one idea, resumed her search for Ascot "tips."

"I vote we make the stream give us up the name of the Hunt Cup winner somehow," she said.

Carstone pondered the matter awhile; then, being a man of ideas on at any rate one subject in the world, an inspiration came to him.

"Get a lot of sticks," he suggested, "label them with the names of the Hunt Cup horses, chuck the sticks into the stream, and see which reaches the lake first."

Eleanor's face lit up with a glow of honest admiration. "You great genius! I'm so glad I'm going to marry you!"

Excited by this somewhat unaccustomed praise, Carstone ran in and out among the rest of the company explaining his scheme and considering amendments. Some sticks of equal size were hastily manufactured; the names of the horses in the Hunt Cup were written on cards, drawn out of a hat by the excited competitors, and tied to the sticks; and the little group of guests assembled by the stream at the head of the valley.

"We'll have a sweepstake; a sovereign each," said Carstone with authority.

"Oh, make it a fiver," pleaded Anstruther.

The suggestion was, however, ignored, except that Carstone whispered irritably to Eleanor:

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"Damn that chap, he never can take a joke quietly." And the girl answered vigorously: "He's a prince of cads; a bounder right away from the word 'jump.'" Then at a signal, eleven sticks were dropped into the river.

Thereupon a curious thing happened. The stick belonging to Jack Hamilton, with the name of The Druid written upon its card, shot out at once from the others and without the slightest check from stones, reeds or turns of the stream, sailed straight away to the lake, arriving there thirty or forty yards in front of its nearest attendant; alone of all its companions it sailed down without mishap of any sort, and won the race in a fashion which suggested that the owner of the real Druid might now go away comfortably and spend his winnings. The sticks were followed by an excitedly shouting party; and as The Druid twisted round a final sharp curve into the lake, Lord Seaford was overwhelmed with congratulations.

"My word, that is an extraordinary thing," exclaimed the proprietor of the stick in genuine amazement. "I give you my word of honour, Lord Seaford, I never touched it! It was any odds against that stick winning! By George, I'll have a plunge and a half on The Druid to-morrow!"

"By George, so will I," cried Seaford, almost equally excited, "that's the most extraordinary tip Providence ever condescended to give me!"

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I'll back my old Druid till the Ring won't take another penny from me, even at ten to one on."

"Here come the boats," said Lady Arlington, who had been looking on at this last race with a somewhat bored smile. "Anyone who likes is coming across to the Island to tea. And, oh dear! I suppose we shall have to race to the Island, and race home again after tea, and have a final walking match up to the house, and a sweepstake about who can eat most at dinner. You look tired, Harry. Why don't you stay here and rest instead of coming with us?"

"I am a bit tired," said Seaford, "and don't feel altogether in picnic humour. Leave me here. I want to do something absolutely unique; something that I have never done in my life before."

"What's that?" asked Lady Arlington, eyeing her companion in some little alarm.

"To think," said the Marquis.



## CHAPTER VIII

**L** EFT alone, the Marquis of Seaford sat down and began to think, according to promise. The expression of his face was that of a man who has just discovered that two and one make three, and dimly suspects that, lurking somewhere out of sight and out of grasp, is another figure of one which, if he could catch it and join it to the others, would make four, and would leave everything a good deal more complete and satisfactory than it was at present.

Perhaps, in spite of much assertion to the contrary, a man without family ties has, quite as often as a woman, a feeling that he is generally incomplete and has missed his mark. Fill a great Belgrave Square house from attic to cellars with servants and guests, with half the wits of Paris and London, with artists and gamblers, dancers and cooks; and the owner will wander round it night and day knowing, at the back of his soul, that in every room there are vacant seats and empty spaces which his guests and their gayest riot cannot fill. Put him in a tiny flat with just room for himself and a cigar and a dog, and even there an empty corner will obtrude itself now and then. Age comes on, the great house grows emptier, its light is failing, the man cannot go

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out of one of its silent rooms without thinking of all the people who have gone out of it for the last time and will never come back. To live for one's self, by one's self, spending money and thought gallantly on every desire as it comes, is a delightful life, whatever preachers would have us believe otherwise, so long as one desires anything at all, attainable or unattainable. When all desire fails, and there is nothing new under the sun, and we should not want it if there were, it is no longer good to be alone in the world.

This spectre of satiety was sitting by the side of the Marquis of Seaford now, and he did not like its company. It was a new companion, and it frightened him as no thought of ruin and disaster or death itself had ever frightened him before. The new visitor brought with it no offer or hope of retrieval. Bad fortune could be changed, sin expiated, sickness cured; but if you have had enough of everything in the world there is no medicine known to mankind which can make you wish for more. Self-indulgence has a stern, bottomless precipice at the end of its sunny path; men tell one another in scared whispers that the precipice really is yonder; but a host of warnings does not do much to mitigate the shock when it comes into sight, and you may not stop, and the fall is obviously going to hurt very badly.

Seaford had no idea why during the last few days the spectre had been coming nearer and nearer, the precipice coming so insistently into

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sight. Or perhaps he had an idea and did not choose to face it. He would be nearly ruined if The Druid were beaten on Wednesday, and the fact vexed him very much as it vexed him to be put next to a dull companion at dinner. He had been nearly ruined half a score of times before and was quite used to the sensation. Tradesmen and money-lenders were demanding money immediately, tenants were writing bitter complaints about his neglect of his property; and his secretary merely showed him once a week a summary of the complaints and of the sympathetic replies to them which he—the Marquis—was supposed to have dictated. My Lord read, perhaps, one such list out of ten; if there was a complaint in it which struck his fancy,—or in other words if any tenant had the wit to hint that he had lost money by backing one of the Seaford horses,—and if at the moment my Lord happened to be in funds, and remembered the complaint ten minutes afterwards, and his secretary chanced to be in the way at the time, that particular tenant's grievance was remedied with a lavish hand; the remedy creating more mischief and ill-feeling on the Cumberland property than if every complaint had been equally ignored. It was rarely, however, that Lord Seaford added to the jealousies and grievances of his tenants in this fashion. A big bet fretted him very little; other matters not at all; yet as he sat under the trees in the Spring Valley at Beddowes this

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afternoon, his face was very grave, and he was evidently trying for the first time in his life to face one of life's problems.

Was Whitmore the centre of the problem? Or Stanier? Or a possible quarrel between the two men? Lord Seaford thought so; he honestly believed that he was sitting here now for the sole purpose of considering the welfare of his boy friend. Cynicism is the foolishness only of weak men; and the Marquis was not cynically candid enough to realise the fact that men like himself have no serious life problems except those of which they themselves are the centre. The fact that Seaford had sat down to consider something seriously was a complete and irrefutable proof that the matter concerned principally his own pleasure.

Moreover, though the Marquis could gamble, and ride, and shoot big game, and ruin a woman and confront her husband afterwards, with superb courage, his courage vanished when it came to such a matter as self-examination, and he shirked all thought of the principal factor in the problem. As he sat among the bracken now, facing the placid lake water, on which the late afternoon light already lay with a dim adumbration of sunset colour, he utterly refused to think of himself and . . . Pamela.

Pamela was going to marry Whitmore. She liked Whitmore and had said so; she liked him with that entirely animal affection which such a

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youth, with his dark passionate eyes, and olive cheeks and full lips, might very easily inspire in the mind of some girl, thoughtless, headstrong and essentially impure like Pamela. An elder woman who had five grains of affection for her daughter, or one grain of worldly sense regarding her welfare, would have turned such a youth out of the house at the first hint of a love affair. To Lord Seaford, who knew his young friend from head to foot, inside and out, it was inconceivable that a girl like Pamela Carstone, who knew more of the world than any ordinary woman of fifty, and had plenty of brains and wit of her own, and intelligence to understand the results of her own actions, could seriously propose to marry Whitmore and live on such stray portions of the young man's revenues as his creditors were not sharp enough to forestall. Did she really mean to carry her passion for Whitmore to the point of marrying him? If so, what was she doing with Stanier? Was she in love with either of the men? If so, what was her feeling for . . . himself?

The endless power of self-deception inherent in persons like the Marquis of Seaford is as much a nuisance to themselves as an injury to their neighbours. This man, for instance, thoroughly meant what he said when he told Lady Arlington in effect that he meant to pick Whitmore out of the mud, scrub him clean, and present him, a permanently reformed character, clear of debt

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and difficulty, to Pamela. He meant it now; at any rate he would have repeated the promise at this moment without conscious insincerity. Yet months ago his mind had suddenly seen a new possibility in Pamela's friendship for himself and in his own affection for her; and every day during the present spring and summer he had looked half consciously into the girl's eyes, and half consciously considered her words, to find a new and half-hoped-for meaning in them. If he had found the meaning he would have gone on from day to day expecting fate to provide him with some solution of the uninvited problem which it had presented to him.

One little flickering ray of sense was, however, darting about Lord Seaford's brain this afternoon. He knew what happened when he gave rein to his whims; at the bottom of his soul he realised that this new passion, if acknowledged and let loose in his usual fashion, would devastate the lives of all his best friends; and with a unique effort of self-restraint he was trying now to kill it at birth. Unluckily the Marquis' idea of killing a desire at birth was to look the other way while it was being born, and hope vaguely that something would go wrong with the operation. He sat now with eyes carefully averted from the realities of his own case; and the clearest feeling in his mind was one of resentment that the same mental processes of the same man should be called upon to settle a

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jockey's dispute or a point involving the happiness or misery of two or three intimately beloved lives for all time, and maybe for eternity too. It is, if one comes to think of it, a vexatious and ill-regulated system by which years of petty selfishness, petty self-indulgence, and idle decisions in favour of one's own amusement can so form—or deform—a man's mind that he cannot fling them aside when he must make a decision on which a score of helpless souls are unwillingly depending.

Goodness knows what might have happened as the result of this startling period of reflection on Seaford's part; it was not allowed, however, to be uncomfortably prolonged, for there was a rustling in the trees close to the Marquis, who looked up and saw a young girl, apparently a gipsy, peering down at him. She smiled gravely as her eyes met Lord Seaford's, and he jumped up with an exclamation of relief. Gipsy fortune-telling is better fun than thought. Also, this girl seemed rather pretty.

"Will your Honour cross the poor gipsy's hand with silver and hear your fortune?" came the question in regulation sing-song.

"The gipsies have found me again, have they?" asked Seaford, with childish delight on his face. "And who are you? The gipsy queen herself perhaps? No, you're not old enough."

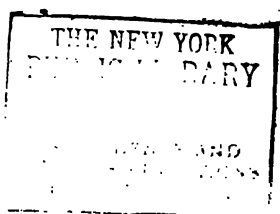
"A mere humble gipsy, your Honour."

"No, no," cried Seaford, laughing, "you must



The Marquis looked up and saw a young girl, apparently a gipsy, peering down at him





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be a princess at least. You're pretty enough. And I really must have a princess to tell my fortune."

"Your Honour knows all things," said the slow sing-song, in which, however, a close listener might have detected some considerable alarm. "I am in truth the Princess Romana, the most famous fortune-teller of my tribe, whose prophecies have never failed. Come weal, come woe, I see all the future, and if my hand is crossed with silver I can tell of love and death, of honours, fame, disaster, and ruin; and never err."

"Well, perhaps you'd better begin now," suggested Seaford with mock seriousness, in which there was a good deal more seriousness than mockery. "The tale seems likely to be long, not to say unpleasant. But don't pile up the agony, Princess, more than you can help, will you?"

"I can but read my tale aloud as I see it written," was the sedate reply.

"Oh, do skip the unpleasant parts," pleaded Seaford, with a laugh. "Everyone has been reading them to me lately, and my doctor says depression is bad for me. My brain—don't laugh, Princess, that's what the doctor called it—can't stand hearing of any more misfortune."

The gipsy cast an extremely nervous glance at the pathway by which Lady Arlington and her guests had recently gone to their boats; she ap-

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peared to be somewhat anxious lest the party should return.

"I read what I see, and I see what I must," she said briefly. "Your Honour will now give me your hand."

"Well, here goes. Now for the worst."

As Seaford held out his hand the gipsy bent over it for a moment, touching its lines with her fingers, but showing a singular resemblance to a child who has forgotten the opening words of a lesson and is trying to remember them. Presently came a little sigh of relief, and the recitation began in a soft, steady monotone: "This is a rare hand; I have seen but one like it before; it is the hand of a man who alone, himself, makes and mars his own future. He can call honour and wealth to himself, and fling them away. Very soon, almost at once," pretending to examine the hand more closely, "I think even tomorrow or next day, some new wish or plan of his is to be decided yes or no. It is a chance on which he might if he pleased set some great stake of fame or fortune. The chance is to be decided near to where he stands now." There was another long examination, after which the young fortune-teller dropped the hand which she was holding, moved back against a tree, folded her own hands and looked steadily up into the sky. "The chance will fail," she went on firmly; "I see it written on his hand and in the stars that the chance will fail. It is written there beyond

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question or doubt or hope. Yet its failure need mean nothing to the man, for he need not risk anything on its success."

"You are right," said the Marquis, speaking half to himself, but eyeing the girl a little doubtfully as he went on: "It's wonderful, by George, I have got a big chance on Wednesday which I want badly to pull off . . . Yet, of course you gipsies living on the Heath must know all about the races, and you may know who I am. Yet . . . Why do you think this chance will fail?"

"I read what is written in the stars," said Princess Romana, looking round her as if debating whether she might now go.

"The stars don't happen to mention, do they," asked Seaford, "what will win the Hunt Cup if The Druid doesn't? No?"—as the Princess shook her head very decisively—"well, this is rough on my tenants in Cumberland, who are backing The Druid to a man, to pay for the new gates and things which I can't afford to stand them. They'll grumble. They'd do that in any case; in the best season ever known old Bates came to me and complained that he would have no damaged hay for the young calves; but they'll have something solid to grumble about this time."

"You are a great lord in your country?" Princess Romana came nearer to her companion; a serious, hesitating look coming over the

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round, pretty face, as if the Princess had something to say which was not in her lesson, and about whose expediency she was a little doubtful.

Seaford smiled wearily. "My family's as old as the hills, and infinitely more respectable; but I'm too poor to play the lord with much success. My subjects question my right to spend their money at Newmarket instead of on the new gates which I have just mentioned. Sometimes when the worthy folk are in good spirits, or when good spirits are in them, they cheer the toast of my health at a rent dinner; but on the whole they disapprove of me extremely. This will be a new shock to them."

"Among our people," answered the little hesitating voice, more sure apparently of its faith than of its words, "a ruler must think first of us and our happiness, and of himself last. Fortune would not be kind if each of us asked her gifts only for ourselves."

Seaford looked a little surprised; his voice became serious in response to the other.

"And you think, little Princess, that fortune would be kinder to me if someone else was going shares in what she gave me?"

"Perhaps," said Biddy Gilmour carefully.

"But it happens, Princess, that someone is to share my winnings on Wednesday," said Seaford in eager argument; "a very dear friend, who loves another equally dear friend of mine. Do

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read the stars again and see if that makes any difference."

The child hesitated for a moment, not quite seeing her way out of this question; then she decided that it would be unsafe to go beyond her lesson.

"The stars have but one message," she said with youthful austerity, "and I have read it to you. Maybe this chance is not the right way to win help for your friends or pleasure for yourself."

"But is Fortune so very particular," asked Seaford, "as to how every morsel of her gracious favours come to us, and what we do with every bit of them?"

Biddy inserted the toe of one shoe delicately into the middle of some ferns and gently stroked their fronds with it.

"I have another name, your Honour," she said softly, "for what you call fortune."

"Yes, yes, I understand." Seaford drew back a few paces and looked at the child with growing awe and curiosity. "You tell me again what I learnt from another fortune-teller of your people, a young girl whose fame was all over Cumberland. I went to her one week before a certain Derby, when a horse of mine was running, to ask about its fate. She was dying, and she lay on the hillside, with heather for a bed, and the moonlight white on her face, looking at me with eyes which already knew the last great secret,

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She told me, too, that I should not have what I desired, and she told me, like you, that never in my life should I win chances where success mattered to myself at all."

"And was she right about the race?" asked Biddy curiously.

"God help me, yes! And you will be right about next Wednesday. But tell me, child, cannot your stars show me how to help a friend if it is without doing myself any benefit? Would Fortune—I go on using my own word; the other name is for your lips, not for such as mine—would Fortune be kinder if success meant nothing at all to me, but all the world to two friends?"

Reluctantly the little maid shook her head again.

"I don't think Fortune makes bargains like that," she said.

"The people in the stars would not, you think, accept the bargain, even if one renounced all gain from it? Yet the renunciation would be very unpleasant. You know, renunciation and pain do hurt, even if they are undertaken willingly for others, and are borne willingly."

"Oh, no, no!" Biddy protested vehemently against this contradiction of all the doctrine which she had ever learnt at her convent. "Pain cannot hurt when it's lifted up to—to—the stars, and suffered bravely there."

Seaford stood very still for a moment, looking

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out over the lake, where the sunset colours and shadows were growing heavier, and the evening stillness was deepening. For a moment he hardly cared to speak. This child voice with its simple words had sunk deeper than he liked to allow. Presently he shook himself, and made a little sound as if he were lying buried under a hill and sought to move the burden, and spoke again with affected lightness.

"Well, little preacher, you stick to it that Fortune has nothing good in store for me next Wednesday, and is not to be bribed by my offers to share the luck with somebody else. By the way, you forgot about having your hand crossed with silver. Perhaps that would have changed the story? No? Well, we must make the best of it."

The child held out her hand reluctantly, and eyed the coin which was put into it with vexed eyes.

"This is gold," she said, trying to give it back.

"It includes payment for a kiss," said the Marquis gaily, holding the little hand which was stretched out to him. Then, as the little lady shrank away, he held out another sovereign with more amused laughter. "Is the price not enough? Here's some more."

The little maid thrust back the first coin crossly into his hand, and looked round the silent deserted valley with scared eyes. Seaford saw



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the glance with an odd pang of shame and regret, and let go the child's hand.

"I'm stupid," he said in his quietest, most caressing voice; "I apologise for thinking that you sell such gifts for such dull stuff as gold. Only . . . we are friends now, aren't we, Princess? And surely among the gipsies a little maiden comes now and then to a friend who is dull and weary, and—and——"

Biddy hesitated for a long moment, then moved slowly forward, with her eyes studying the ferns, and held up her lips, blushing scarlet as the man's lips bent down to kiss them twice. Then some flowers were put into her hand, and a voice which she hardly recognised as Lord Seaford's asked her gently: "Will you take these forget-me-nots, and while they last remember me for a moment or two now and then, and ask your friends in the stars to look down and be merciful? Good-bye."

Biddy stood very still for a moment, with tears hanging on her eye-lashes; then moved slowly back among the trees.

"Good-bye," she whispered. "The flowers will soon be dead, but the forget-me-not will never die."

## CHAPTER IX

**L**ORD SEAFORD'S common sense and strength of mind were like a field of grain with scarecrows stuck up in it at irregular intervals. He could weigh the value, for instance, of a Newmarket training gallop or trial to a nicety, and knew just what value to attach to the trainer's assurances, the betting market on the race, the choice of a jockey and the state of the ground. When throughout a day or week he stood to win money by his own judgment, he mostly won, and occasionally won very largely. But confront him with a fortune-teller or racing omen of any sort, and his common sense melted before it like ice on a hot plate. My Lord would study a trainer's face while he was talking, and tell you nine times out of ten when the man was lying, and when and where it would be prudent to take his advice; but if a gipsy child told him to back an Epsom cab horse against the Derby favourite, he would do it unhesitatingly.

Therefore, walking from the Spring Valley this afternoon he regarded The Druid's chance of winning the Hunt Cup as finally extinguished. The Druid's stick had, it is true, won the race in the stream; but among the many prophets of this description which the Marquis consulted,

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nothing weighed in his mind against the words of a gipsy. There was a sixteen year old lad and fourteen year old little maid of the tribe who had married and set up a caravan of their own, on the strength of having met the Marquis the day before one Derby Day on Epsom Downs, and foretold the victory of his colt, and having had sufficient presence of mind to lie in wait for him after the race and claim their reward.

Severely depressed therefore by The Druid's apparently inevitable defeat, Lord Seaford strode homewards, moodily cutting down flowers and ferns with his stick, and debating whether honour compelled him to back his horse in face of such a foregone conclusion as this one. Presently he came to the gate of the rose garden and, entering, found himself among some thick high bushes covered with June roses.

There was a curious silence in the garden. The birds had gone to rest in the scented hedges, except that now and then a great flight of rooks passed cawing overhead to their nests in the great elms beyond the lakes; sunset light reddened the paths and made dark crimson blotches of the wide-open pink and yellow blooms which bordered them; the gardeners had gone home; the hostess and her guests were far away down the lake; not even a breath of wind rustled through the heavily scented atmosphere. My Lord Marquis, who loved not such scents and silences, turned away with a pettish exclamation,

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cutting down half a dozen pink rosebuds with his stick as he moved away. Then, turning a corner, he came face to face with Pamela Carstone.

The girl was leaning against the back of a wooden seat, with her hat hanging by her side and her face half buried among the flowers of a rose-bush by her side. The dew of roses was on her forehead and lips, tears hung on her eyelashes, and her lips were trembling; while her cheeks and the rose petals seemed one soft cluster of blooms under the pink light which glowed delicately on them both. The thin white and rose-coloured dress which she was wearing, with a multitude of little pearl brooches and bangles and chains, all faintly tinged by the rose-coloured evening light, and outlined against the dark bushes and grass, gave a curiously lovely impression of a young scarcely-clothed human figure hiding itself among the flowers.

Lord Seaford watched her in silence for nearly a minute, strange new thrills of emotion running through him as he stood there; then Pamela realised his presence, and slowly turned her head, and held out her hands, with a great light of joy and relief flooding her face. In silence Seaford moved a few steps towards her; in silence the two met and stood there, holding one another's hands and looking into one another's eyes with parted lips and quick-coming breath. The moment and its sudden emotions were in-

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comprehensible to both of them. They could not—perhaps would not—read one another's faces; and they could not speak words, nor understand the strange feeling which they wished to put into words. It was Seaford who at last found another language; he drew Pamela closer to him and put an arm around her and kissed her lips, the girl's slight young figure quivering and pulsating against his, and her voice finding itself in little inarticulate murmurs of pleasure. Still without words, they sat down together on the bench under the rose trees, and turned their faces first to the sunset, then back to one another, and nearer and nearer till their lips met again, and lay pressed together moment after moment. Seaford's hand, resting on the girl's shoulder, dropped slowly to her waist, and Pamela turned and looked at him with a long, steady, quiet look which seemed slowly to become a part of the haze and mystery and softness of the sunset light. The man's arm round her tightened, and drew the young figure nearer till it was resting against his body again. Pamela took his other hand in hers with a sudden frightened movement, and held it, and half let it go, and held it fast again, and then put both her hands on Seaford's shoulder with a long, quivering sigh.

The pale pink light deepened to red and crimson and warm twilight; the rose scent seemed to be the only living thing in the garden, save when a very faint breath of evening wind found its

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way among the tall bushes and hedges, and a petal or two dropped under its touch, and hung swaying for a moment in the perfumed air, and fell slowly to the ground. And still the man and girl sat on, with their faint whispers and rare, slight movements lost in the deepening scented darkness.

## CHAPTER X

**I**T was the first day of the great European garden party which takes place every year at Ascot; and Lady Arlington's guests were early arrivals. No nonsense was tolerated at Beddowes in the matter of unpunctuality, and in truth no argument nor persuasion was required to bring the visitors to their carriages at the appointed time. Unpunctual-minded guests were simply aware that if they were late the party would not wait for them, and that they stood a good chance of following by themselves on foot or not going at all.

The Marquis made his way alone to his box, buried deep in thought, touching his hat mechanically to the various men and women who passed him, and ignoring all attempts at conversation with him. The passers-by who took for granted that he was buried in calculations as to the chances of Kingcup this afternoon, and of The Druid to-morrow, would have been considerably astonished if they had read his thoughts. For the first time in his life the Marquis of Seaford was walking on to a race course thinking of something else than race horses.

He came at last to Tattersall's ring; a place of unhappy memory to him just now; for he had

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not seen any of its inmates since the disastrous day a few weeks ago when the Derby favourite had been beaten, and it had taken the London and Cumberland lawyers three stern days' work, with my Lord at the end of the telegraph wires throughout the day urging them on, to raise the huge sum which had to be paid as the result. Every bookmaker had been paid on the afternoon of the following settling day; and as they caught sight of my Lord now, one after another took off his hat; Knight made a brief speech, expressing his wish, which he doubtless felt sincerely, that every client of his would behave in similar fashion; and at the end of it someone called for three cheers for the Marquis of Seaford. As the cheers rang round Tattersall's, a little crowd came from the race course to the railings and joined in, and the Marquis stood there with the grave, wondering look still on his face. Maybe he was wondering whether such an ovation was worth the fortune which he had squandered to win it; perhaps he was hardly conscious of speech or cheers. It seemed to take him a moment or two to realise that they had been addressed to him; then he raised his hat perfunctorily and moved away.

"He's been hard hit," said Jimmy Wenlow sympathetically. Like half the racing world he had adopted Seaford as a personal friend, though in Jimmy's case the adoption was on a slightly brief acquaintance.



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"He's forgotten all about the Derby and his bets and the payment of them long ago," said Knight; "don't worry yourself to be sympathetic."

Clouds darkened the June afternoon, the lawns were grey with cloaks and mackintoshes, and the sultry air was bad for nerves and tempers. Headed by the Marquis of Seaford the world seemed to go mad on the subject of one horse which was to run during the afternoon. Kingcup could not be beaten; whatever money was lost on other horses during the day did not matter a bit, it would all come back when Kingcup won the Ascot Stakes. Bookmakers shrugged their shoulders and scowled and moved about restlessly as the Marquis and his friends walked round the Ring, taking every bet which was offered about the horse at any price and to any amount that the men would lay. "Even money the field!" was cried while the numbers were being put up on the board. "Take five to four," "Take six to four," "Eight to one bar one," were being called long before the horses came out of the paddock; and as the horses ranged themselves behind the starter's flag, Kingcup could not have been backed to win another sixpence on any part of Ascot race course.

It was a popular occupation among people who knew the Marquis and his affairs to watch him during the progress of a big race on which he had a large stake. They were proud of this cold

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silent Englishman, who saw a horse win or lose a fortune for him with the same polite smile, who discussed the riding of a jockey in cool critical words while thousands of pounds hung on every movement of his hands, and from whose face a moment afterwards the finest physiognomist on earth could not have read whether fortune had smiled radiantly or had dealt a crushing blow. My Lord stood now in front of his box, a thousand eyes turning to him as Kingcup cantered down to the start, while he himself studied the movements of his horse through his huge race glasses and pointed out its merits affably to Stanier. Sir Norman looked round with icy contempt, which he changed hastily to intelligent interest whenever Pamela came near. She glanced at him with amusement, perfectly aware that he was studying this racing business as he would have "got up" any subject in which she had once looked interested. The afternoon was scarcely half over before Sir Norman had a fairly clear idea of what "Eight to one bar one" meant, and was quite excited about the chances of Kingcup.

A score of riders turned out for the Ascot Stakes, very much to Lord Seaford's annoyance. He had a private theory that when one of his own horses was running, only a few "likely" animals which stood a chance of winning ought to be allowed to run against him. To his own intense annoyance now Seaford found that his

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nerves were being seriously upset by this crowd of gay-coloured jackets which were circling round and round at the starting post. They were fretting his horse; they obscured his view; they were utterly abominable. He fumed, cursed under his breath, even for a moment looked angry, so that the crowd watching him concluded that something must be wrong.

Perhaps it was the surprise of one of these watchers at last that made the man pull himself together violently, commend the start, and criticise the points of little Pathfinder, who launched out on a running-making expedition for a Northern stable. Once or twice the Marquis passed his hand impatiently across his eyes as if he could scarcely see; then, as the horses settled down to race, their old sway reasserted itself and Pamela herself could not have distracted his attention as Kingcup strode to the front in an easy canter, raced up the hill without a falter, and won the Ascot Stakes by the width of a street. The Marquis had won a little fortune over the race; none of his friends were without their share of winning bets; and Sir Norman Stanier had his first opportunity of studying a large racing party all congratulating one another on success. He watched them a little enviously; they looked so very well satisfied, so whole-heartedly pleased with their own judgment and luck and newly acquired wealth. Perhaps there really was something admirable in this

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average gambling character, which could take all loss in stoical silence and find so much simple pleasure in a sporting triumph? Two-thirds of these people had won bets which, merely as a matter of money, were hardly of the slightest concern to them. Carstone, Adeane, Pamela, and Lady Arlington, for instance, had no need whatever for the twenty-five or thirty pounds which they had won, and would probably lose most of it again during that afternoon, and certainly on the following day; but if they had owned the winner, and gained a fortune with him, in the nick of time to save themselves from parish relief, they could not have been more delighted. Stanier's studies were becoming tinged with envy instead of scorn.

"What price gipsies now?" asked Jack Hamilton excitedly that evening, as he told one fellow-guest after another about his lucky bets, and then told the whole company at dinner, and discussed his own astuteness with the men afterwards. "That old girl told me on Saturday that I should lose the first day and win the other three."

"If she had got confused, and meant the precise opposite, and the prophecy comes true," suggested Stanier sardonically, "will your respect for gipsies return?"

"I guess," said the young man rudely, "love-affairs are more in her line than horse racing. Do you never feel inclined to consult her?"

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"I am content to imagine all she could say on either topic," said the other with meek austerity, and Jack smiled the smile of a man who for all practical purposes has had the last word.

He watched the manœuvring of Whitmore and Stanier to get near Pamela after dinner with gratitude to Providence, who had kindly provided this comedy for him in a land so far from his beloved music halls. But there seemed to be a new character, or at least a new sub-plot, in the play this evening, which puzzled and rather annoyed him. Playwrights and actors have no right nowadays to mystify their audience seriously; it is out of date. Yet here was Pamela obviously perfectly indifferent whether Whitmore sat on the sofa by her and played with her fan, or Stanier sat opposite with folded arms and elaborated stately compliments; she was watching Seaford, sometimes openly, but more often in furtive, troubled fashion, without intermission. And here was Seaford, restless, moody, and watching Pamela with hesitating, anxious eyes. If the girl wished to speak to him, why on earth did she not run across the room to him, as she had done ever since she could walk? If the Marquis wanted to talk to her, why did he not come to her side, brush all the other men away like troublesome flies, as his manner was, and sit down in the most comfortable of their vacant places? Had they quarrelled? The house had echoed with it for two days on the only occasion

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in the past when this had happened. Was something wrong about Whitmore, and Pamela suspicious, and Seaford unwilling to be asked any questions? Just now, at any rate, the young man seemed to be having it all his own way; he was sitting very close to the girl and making love to her for all he was worth, so that Stanier presently abandoned his position and stalked angrily into the garden by himself. Then, with another smile, Jack saw Lady Carstone saunter out and join Stanier; after which, with one more futile look round the room in search of amusement, Mr. Hamilton also went out of doors, on mischief bent.

On a distant part of the lawn his sister Eleanor was walking up and down with Lord Carstone; under a tree were two other figures whom he vaguely thought to be Anstruther and Miss Adeane. "This is a very amorous household," said Jack to himself, and went back to the drawing-room window to prospect for someone with whom he also might open a moonlight flirtation.

Looking into the room his eyes fell on Seaford, who had just beckoned to his side the man Darcy, one of the Marquis's most familiar henchmen and toadies. My Lord issued some brief instructions, on which Darcy went across to Pamela and talked to her for a few moments, apparently praising the fineness of the night, since he looked and waved his hand once or twice

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towards the open windows. To watch an animated conversation without hearing a word of it causes the watcher to note expression with unusual acuteness; and Jack saw a look of comprehension dawn slowly in the girl's face; then she got up and strolled out of doors with Darcy, leaving Whitmore a comical spectacle of open-mouthed, petrified amazement and indignation. Thereafter the little comedy continued on obvious lines. Lord Seaford came out and joined the pair, Darcy disappeared, and the Marquis and Pamela walked slowly away across the moonlit grass.

They walked in silence, studying their own feet, apparently, with absorbed interest; and Mr. Jack Hamilton gave a prolonged whistle expressive of the deepest bewilderment. He dared not follow them; he hardly saw his way to going up to Lord Seaford afterwards and demanding the inner meaning of this mystery; and he disliked extremely to feel that he was out of it. Conceive the possibility that there was something wrong with The Druid, and that he—Jack Hamilton—should know nothing about it till he read the sporting papers next morning! It is terrible to be behind one's age.

## CHAPTER XI

SEAFORD and Pamela strolled across the lawn, half consciously evading the other people who were wandering about, and moving towards a clump of yew trees in a distant corner. Having arrived here, Pamela looked round her in somewhat scared fashion, moved a little way from Seaford, studied a branch of one of the trees intently in the moonlight, and at last glanced up at him with parted lips, and eyes full of frightened enquiry. The look hurt him for a moment; then in his usual optimistic fashion, he supposed that she was sleepy and tired after the day's excitement.

"You looked a bit dull, little one, sitting there with Whitmore and Stanier, so I sent Darcy to rescue you. Now you look tired, so very soon I'm going to send you to bed."

"Even the children are being allowed to stay up to-night, to celebrate Kingcup's victory," said Pamela, with a shaky laugh. "There's Marjorie sitting on the railings over there, looking at us. So you must let me stay up too."

"Well, you shall go back to your sofa in the drawing-room as soon as you like."

"With Whitmore and Sir Norman glaring at one another, and fighting to get nearest to me,



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and each of them muttering 'Damn the chap' under his breath, when the other speaks to me for more than half a minute? No, thank you. It's cooler out here, literally and metaphorically."

"Then Whitmore and Stanier are quite on a level in your mind, Pamela?"

The girl shook herself impatiently, sighed, shrugged her shoulders, looked out across the moonlit park with vaguely tired eyes. "Oh . . . no," she said. "At least I suppose not."

"Won't you tell me your real feelings about the pair?" asked Seaford gently. "I have an excellent gift of silence; and you have always told me everything."

"Did you ever know old Lord Whitmore, Julian's grandfather?" the girl asked abruptly, and with apparent irrelevance. "He used to come and stay with us in Norfolk."

"I knew him slightly," said the other, with a grave smile. "His life was not edifying. The history of old Whitmore, and all that he did, and the people whom he 'did,' would make a large and far from moral volume. Whenever people blame Julian for his life," added the Marquis quickly, having apparently caught Pamela's thought, "I remind them that he never knew any other guardian but his grandfather."

"I know," the girl answered slowly and reluctantly; "yes, I know . . . No one can

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blame Julian . . . Such a dreadful old man he was! When he was eighty, you know, he married his gardener's daughter, who was not quite eighteen. Julian says the curate at the church looked frightfully disgusted, and stared at the child for a moment, and said to old Whitmore: 'Sir, the font is at the other end of the church.' They came to stay with us afterwards. How Granny did hate them both! And the girl said to me one day: 'I've married an old conundrum, and I've given it up.' Even then old Lord Whitmore used to lay his octogenarian heart whenever he had the chance at the feet of a pretty housemaid, and repent afterwards—he was very devout, you know—in ashes taken from her dustpan."

"Why are you suddenly recalling these memories of such a very disagreeable person?"

Pamela shrugged her shoulders again, moved once more a few steps away, and stared out into the June night with troubled eyes. Why had she been recalling these memories? What was the precise meaning of the feeling of irritation and discomfort which was filling her soul now, of the vexed desire to make the worst of Whitmore and all his belongings and relatives dead and alive? Profound selfishness has one advantage which rarely receives proper notice, nor is regarded with adequate gratitude; it warns us of coming discomfort by a hundred insistent signals; and your really selfish person understands

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of course that the signal "discomfort ahead" applies to himself, and that it therefore merits the strictest attention. Miss Pamela Carstone, who had never in her life thought a thought, or said a word, or performed an action, the chief object of which was not her own amusement and her own pleasure, knew all these signals well and gave them the attention which was their due. In other words, she had been paying no attention for some time past to anything else.

"I don't think," went on Seaford, in a curiously strained voice, "Julian has inherited any of his grandfather's peculiarities. At any rate it's rather early to judge now."

There was a long pause before Pamela answered: "Oh, yes, much too early."

"Perhaps, after all, Stanier is going to be the winner?" Real bewilderment was in Seaford's voice, and yet more of it on his face, when in answer to this question the girl merely made an impatient movement and then stood very still again, the white moonlight showing an absolutely impassive, expressionless face. "It lies between them, doesn't it?" the man went on. "And if you have been recalling all the misdeeds of Julian's grandfather . . . ?"

"That's got nothing to do with Julian, has it?" Pamela muttered crossly.

"Perhaps not. How should I know?" Seaford spoke very gently and with a new access of nervousness, half raising his hand as if he would

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have moved to the girl and touched her, and then dropping it again. "Come, little friend, I want nothing on earth but to know that you are happy; and I want that very badly. I wonder sometimes whether that isn't the only thing I really want in the world nowadays. Come, tell me, would you be happier with Stanier?"

Pamela turned round with real astonishment and indignation on her face.

"With Sir Norman! Happier with Sir Norman Stanier! I've never even thought of him seriously! I've never thought for a minute of marrying him! I speak to him sometimes because he looks unhappy if I don't. I hate to see people looking unhappy. And he's a change from some of the others; and it's really rather comic occasionally to be talked to as if one were an educated person, and knew Greek, and had ever heard of any poets or philosophers except the ones who are called after your race horses."

"I'm rather glad," said the Marquis. His voice sounded glad, but with just a little bit of doubt and wonder in it, as if something were wrong with his companion's speech, but he could not make out what. "It's a trifle rough on Stanier, you know; yet I confess I'm glad."

Pamela turned her face back to the distant moonlight; the animation went out of it and she spoke absently and indifferently again:

"Oh, it won't do Sir Norman much harm.

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He's too wrapped up in his philosophers to mind what I say or do."

"Yes? Is he? . . . Maybe." Again there was the note of doubt and of something like disapproval in the man's voice. "Yet I have known men equally wrapped up in some occupation . . . apparently . . . who might be badly hurt if you treated them like that—who might be very, very badly hurt."

"You think Sir Norman will mind?" asked Pamela indifferently. Then she suddenly remembered that some semblance of friendship had been apparent between the two for the last week or two, and that Seaford might therefore take her words unkindly. "Truly, I don't think it matters to him much," she added hastily. "Do you suppose . . . do you suppose . . . suppose . . . " The girl peered forward, stared at her companion's face, came a step nearer to him, and stood there puzzled, shocked, rather frightened. "Will Sir Norman mind?" she repeated in a whisper.

Lord Seaford shook his head.

"I wasn't thinking of Stanier," he said huskily.

In great and ever growing agitation Pamela stood for a long minute looking at her companion; the moonlit grass and trees, motionless in the still night, were hardly whiter or more still than her face. All the laws and ideals and contented grooves of her life were tumbling into

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chaos round her, while a new emotion was defining itself in the middle of them—as sailors tell you they have seen a new island born from out of the volcano bed of the Pacific, and rise suddenly among its heaving waves. To live for one's self, to believe in one's self, to hope, plan, fear, to be glad and sorry, angry, discontented and satisfied, all for one's self, for the space of twenty-three years, and then suddenly to be confronted with an emotion in which the pleasure or pain of somebody else plays even a trifling part—this is confusing. Pamela was as hopelessly confounded as that ship in the Pacific which is steering by the old charts, and is suddenly confronted with the new island. Here is one solid new piece of land, says the captain in bewildered irritation; how many more new islands are there, and how many others have disappeared? Is the chart, in effect, worth a penny?

Looming through this eddying mist of life-long, self-centred faiths which had been shattered, and laws which had been broken to fragments, was, however, the one visible fact that this friend who was with her now had been really hurt, and that she had not meant to hurt him. The girl's selfishness was not perhaps so solid and ingrained as it seemed. For one brief astonished moment at any rate her whole heart and soul left her, and went out in a passion of sympathy and self-condemnation and nervous re-

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morse to this man, whose face and voice told her a story which she had heard a dozen times before with amusement, boredom or pride, but never with a groat of sympathy.

"You weren't thinking of Sir Norman?" Pamela came close up to him, and put a hand on his arm, and spoke with no attempt to conceal her agitation. "You weren't talking about his being hurt if I behaved like that? . . . Oh, but I wouldn't do like that, you know, to anybody I cared about—not to anybody I cared about the smallest bit. I wouldn't hurt a real friend of mine in that way, for one single moment, for anything in the world."

"Not—if—if—you guessed, perhaps," said Seaford in a whisper; and at the quivering pain and anxiety in this beloved friend's voice it seemed to Pamela suddenly as if her whole past life and future selfish scheming had dropped away into oblivion, and there was nothing left of her but one great passion of desire to give this man everything he wanted in the world and die in the giving of it.

"Perhaps I couldn't guess," she whispered incoherently. . . . "Oh, how could I tell? . . . How could I know? . . . Won't you believe me when I tell you that if it were a question of anybody I cared about, I would cut my hand off sooner than I would let him fall in love with me, unless I could give him everything he wanted?"

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Seaford took the girl's hand and bent over her with unconcealed love in his face and voice:

"But if you didn't know," he said, "till it was too late . . . or almost too late?"

"Almost too late! Why . . . !"

Across the wide lawn the eyes of man and girl suddenly caught a succession of movements; and from their far-off world of love and passion they suddenly came back to an earthly garden and a residence filled with common and prying mortals. Marjorie, seated on a distant railing, buried apparently in thought, had suddenly jumped to the ground, run a few steps across the lawn, stopped in front of an advancing male figure, and was now walking backwards in front of this figure slowly, protestingly and noisily.

"Pamela's really very tired to-night," she was announcing; and her voice, usually soft and rather pretty, was loud and shrill. "I'm certain and sure Pamela doesn't want to play cards to-night. I'm almost sure she'll be quite cross if you ask her. Hadn't you better go back alone?"

The advancing figure of Whitmore could be seen trying angrily to brush aside this backward-dancing, obstructive sprite.

"Oh, yes; Pamela wants very badly to play a game called baccarat to-night. She'll win a great lot of money, you know, and she'll like that. Come along, and help me find her, chick."

Even as he spoke Whitmore caught sight of



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the two figures behind the yew trees, and as he saw them he gave a great sigh of relief. Stanier, he had supposed, was there, making audacious love to Pamela on his own account; instead of that, Lord Seaford was with Pamela and was of course advocating Whitmore's claims. With a glowing smile of relief the young man advanced to the pair.

"You told me to tell you," he said to Pamela, "when the baccarat party was made up. Well, come along, they're ready. You'll come too, Seaford, won't you?"

"I'm at your orders," answered the Marquis helplessly, after a brief pause.

"I suppose I must come," said Pamela crossly, with an aggrieved look at Seaford and a curl of her lip expressive of her contempt for a man of so little resource. Then to emphasise her contempt she strolled on in front with Whitmore, leaving the Marquis with Marjorie. My Lord looked, as he felt, embarrassed, having a vague idea that he ought to say something about dolls and history lessons, and not being quite familiar with either subject.

"I tried"—the young lady saved him the trouble of initiating a conversation by beginning a topic herself—"I tried to keep him away a little longer. I did indeed. But he would come and interrupt you."

"You—tried—to—keep . . . By George!" The Marquis of Seaford stopped in the middle of

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the lawn and stared down open-mouthed at this creature, whose brown curls were somewhere in the neighbourhood of his own waist. "I say, how old are you?" he asked abruptly; for a relative of his own had remained this size, and retained dresses of this length, till she was nearly eighteen; and if this person were a freak of like nature everything would be accounted for.

"Ten," said Marjorie briefly.

"The devil you are!" said the Marquis, startled out of his manners for a moment. "I say, do you think . . . I say, if you happen to feel obliged to mention this to anybody . . . Look here, would a couple of guineas' worth of chocolate be any use to you?"

"I shouldn't think of telling anybody anything," said the young person with dignity. "And I don't want your chocolate, thank you. I don't like Lord Whitmore, you know; and I'm glad Pamela likes you best."

"You're glad Pamela likes . . . !" My Lord Marquis began to repeat the words in a tone of such blank amazement as the finest elocutionist could hardly hope to rival.

"Yes, I'm glad," said Marjorie simply, in a very soft little voice, and turned to move away.

For answer the Marquis of Seaford came close to the little child, took one ridiculously small white hand into his large brown one, swept aside his broad thick moustache, and bent down and kissed the little fingers without a word. Then

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he followed Whitmore and Pamela alone into the house.

Marjorie stood on the lawn for a moment watching the retreating figure; then she gave two sage nods of her head, so that half a dozen curls fell over her eyes, which had filled suddenly with unaccountable tears, and over her lips, which were trembling unreasonably as she spoke to herself:

“I suppose,” said the young lady, “that’s a case of what Daddy would call ‘any price outsiders.’”

## CHAPTER XII

**A** CURIOUS feeling of timidity, unknown and unwelcome, held Lord Seaford all next morning. He could have seen Pamela alone half a dozen times if he had the mind to try; she looked at him wonderingly as she passed him once or twice in the hall and stood near him in the garden; then, as he would take no notice except to look steadily back at her, she moved away across the lawn, summoning Whitmore by a slight smile to follow her. The Marquis saw the summons; he had been waiting for it, and expecting it; he had stayed nervously aside from Pamela to let her have a chance to give it, and as he saw the chance taken he went to his room (from which, however, he could watch the lawn) and said to himself that he was a fool and a dotard to suppose that this girl had ever thought of him except as a being from another world and another century, playing some part in her life compounded of father, grandfather, schoolmaster and confessor. The warm June sun fell round him here only as the cold light of day, showing wrinkled eyes, thin grey hair, a mouth set hard and stern in the midst of a score of long, hard lines, such as mark themselves on the face of a man who for more than half a century has

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taken stern resolutions and violent decisions a dozen times a week, and has forced them through, reckless of all consequence, and indifferent to everybody else's desires. Was it likely that Pamela, standing in the white dawn of youth, with half a dozen playmates of her own age standing round her eager to join a life to hers, and go laughing through it together, sharing home, love, children as they went,—would such a one look back half a hundred years and invite someone to come out of this twilight and be a companion to her fair youth? What a silly story! What an idle, unprofitable dream!

The two figures wandering across the lawn stood by some railings motionless for several minutes, Seaford watching them from his window. Then they returned towards the house, Pamela walking with bowed head and stopping occasionally to dig her parasol into the grass, as though totally absorbed in listening to her companion's words. How was a man at a window to know that she did not hear a single word the companion said, and was looking right and left under her eyes in search of Seaford, and was furious with herself for her folly in dragging Whitmore to the front again! Of course Whitmore thought that he had been invited on to the scene in order to displace Seaford; of course he was perfectly justified in behaving as her lover, and in taking for granted that in all emergen-

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cies, and after trying all other pretendants to her intimate friendship, she came back to him at last.

Presently it was time to drive across to the race course, and Lady Arlington came up to the girl.

"Tell me, Pamela," she asked anxiously, "is Seaford really going to make this frightful bet on The Druid? You're more likely to know than I am, and, if it isn't done, more likely to be able to stop it."

"Last night he didn't know himself," the girl answered. "He is torn between the advice of that gipsy child and the commonplace knowledge that his horse has got about a stone in hand of everything else in the race. Nobody could possibly tell what he will do unless they know everybody who is likely to speak to him between now and three o'clock."

Noting the tone of lassitude in which Pamela spoke, Lady Arlington eyed her sharply, and looked puzzled when she turned away with a gesture of vexation and resumed her watch on the morning-room windows, by which various guests were entering and coming out of the house at intervals. Whitmore had been with her for an hour and was standing close by, so she could not be looking for him. Was it for Stanier? Apparently not, for Stanier came out at the moment and Lady Arlington heard a pettish exclamation from her companion. "If he comes and speaks

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to her now," said Lady Arlington to herself with conviction, "she'll eat him."

Instead of doing this, however, Pamela muttered something about its being time to dress for the races, and left Sir Norman alone, looking after her ruefully, before he had finished explaining that if he owned race horses he would engage Arabian horsemen to ride them. Whitmore, too, followed the girl with bitter glances as she moved indoors, and then he and Stanier eyed one another with something resembling sympathy. Neither could tell which man was winning, though each thought it about two to one on the other.

Pamela spoke to no one; she came downstairs, walked straight into the nearest carriage which had a place vacant, and drove to the course with her nose in the air and eyes fixed steadily on the footman's hat. Whitmore came forward to help her out of the carriage, but the young face which confronted him was a face of stone. Silence hung over the whole party as they walked towards the stands, and it was more with the idea of putting an end to a feeling of oppression than with any desire for information on the subject, that Carstone turned to Whitmore and asked languidly: "I say, old chap, I suppose that three-year-old of yours has got no earthly chance, has she?"

"Pamela? My dear fellow, have you ever seen a three-year-old filly win the Hunt Cup

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here? . . . Oh, I daresay the thing has been done. Don't you start giving me statistics, for pity's sake."

"What on earth are you running her for?" the Marquis asked.

"Am I running her? Mercer would be surprised to hear that I have got anything to do with it. I believe the worthy trainer has some idea of sharpening her up for Newcastle. A great local magnate like myself down there must patronise the races, and win one or two."

"Could Pamela win here if she tried?" Carstone demanded with a slightly puzzled look on his face.

"Oh, ask me another one," said Whitmore irritably, not because the question annoyed him particularly,—indeed at any other moment he would have been rather pleased at the idea of his horse being regarded as a possible winner of the great race of the day,—but because Stanier had come to his lady love's side and was offering to summon a certain popular diplomatist and introduce him. Carstone fell back, however, with a stare of mingled vexation and suspicion. In regard to any other matter he would have perceived readily enough the drift of Whitmore's thoughts and the reason of his irritation. But when the winner of a great race was concerned, could anyone suppose that a sane man like Whitmore was allowing his attention to be distracted by such nonsense as love business? There was



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“something up” about the filly Pamela and this race, said the youth to himself sagely; he would go away and would put a tenner each way on her, on the chance of something being “meant.”

Lord Seaford had also heard and been puzzled by these questions and answers, but he did not worry over them for very long. The Druid must win this race; even the gipsies and the stars could hardly have reckoned with the fact that this morning’s paper announced the scratching of Sea King, who had been the only danger to the Seaford horse . . . The Marquis marched now into Tattersall’s ring and demanded the price of The Druid.

The Druid was favourite, said half a dozen bookmakers in a breath, and . . . and . . .

“What price?” asked Lord Seaford shortly.

Uneasy glances passed to and fro among the little group of bookmakers; one or two of them affected to be attending to other business; no one answered the question.

“What the——” We need not repeat the purely emphatic portion of the Marquis’s speech, which would not look at all nice in print. “What do you all mean by standing glumly there staring solemnly at me and jerking your heads about like a team of hearse horses struck by lightning? Answer me, can’t you, somebody?”

“The Druid’s favourite,” said young Wenlow doggedly, and turned away as if the statement put an effective end to any further discussion.

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"That's the third time I've received that interesting piece of information in the course of the last two minutes; and, as I knew the fact already, it doesn't thrill me with excitement as you evidently think it should. What's his price? Will someone answer me?"

"I've just laid 100 to 30, but . . ." Wenlow turned away with much affected interest to another client who had come up to invest a few sovereigns on another horse.

"But—what?" asked the other with as much amazement on his face as was ever expressed on a human countenance.

"There's no more money to lay against your horse, Marquis," said a burly neighbour of Wenlow's, trying to face my Lord boldly, and failing signally.

For one moment Lord Seaford looked round him in utter bewilderment; then an idea seemed suddenly to occur to him, and his face lit up with rage.

"So you think I am broke at last," he said, coming close up to Knight and Wenlow, and stammering out the words with almost inarticulate fury. "You think you've got every penny out of me that there is to get, and that you'd better look out now for a new man to plunder! Broke, am I? Why, you stupid idiots, if I had no more knowledge of racing business than that, I'd go and set up as errand boys to fried-fish dealers in Whitechapel! Or are you just afraid

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that the horse is going to win? Nice sportsman-like chaps you all are, to be sure! You, Knight, who've had half a million out of me in the last two years—you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"I've only got two things to say in answer to that tirade, Marquis," said the bookmaker, in a low voice, his lips twitching with rage. "First, your horse isn't going to win the Hunt Cup. Second, I lay you here and now, by myself, in one bet, any sum you like against him at the odds which Wenlow just mentioned to you."

Looking rather foolish for a moment, Lord Seaford muttered some words of apology; then he opened his little worn betting book and scrawled down a brief entry. "I'll take two hundred thousand pounds to sixty thousand pounds," he said shortly, and stood still for a moment as if awaiting a protest. But Knight merely nodded, and the Marquis moved away to his box.

The news of the bet flew round Tattersall's Ring, a little buzz of excited talk marking each spot where the news was being retailed. Knight moved about for a few moments, laying off a small portion of his bet, but he meant, apparently, to hold the greater part of it. The horse was not going to win, he stated coolly. Thereupon broke out a storm of opposition to the favourite; cries of "4 to 1 the field" were heard everywhere; then two or three well-known voices

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were shouting "5 to 1 the field, 8 to 1 bar two"; and a confused buzz of questions and exclamations passed round the Ring and the adjacent portion of the lawn. It reached the Marquis's box at last, and a score of friends came up to ask him what was wrong, while a little group of dismayed backers of the favourite collected in front of the box and scanned the faces of its occupants with terrified eyes. "The horse is all right, and I'm not responsible for Bedlam being let loose in Tattersall's," my Lord was heard to say with an angry oath, and the spectators moved on with less gloomy faces.

As the crowd in his box decreased for a moment, Seaford drew Jack Hamilton aside and muttered some directions to him, in answer to which the young man nodded, and left the box with a scared look on his face. My Lord leant over the edge of the box and watched the lad making his way towards Tattersall's, asking a question or two at the railings, then coming rapidly back. Someone spoke to Seaford, and he turned to answer with a look on his face which frightened the questioner horribly; it had vengeance in it, and despair, and yet the sombre bewilderment of a man who does not really understand what is happening, nor whether it may be in the end a matter of sorrow or triumph.

"Pamela's third favourite," said Jack Hamilton, coming back into the box and speaking in a level, expressionless voice. "The Druid and

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Eiger are equal favourites at 6 to 1. Pamela's next at 8 to 1."

"What do you think of the business yourself, Jack?" asked Lord Seaford, staring away with unseeing eyes at the distant Berkshire hills; but Jack only shrugged his shoulders. The case was too serious for jokes, and he knew no other form of speech. Here was a horse of Whitmore's being backed to win the Hunt Cup in a fashion which implied most distinctly that somebody "knew something," while the owner had positively assured all his friends that the creature in question had not a chance, and was not even meant to win. In circumstances of that sort one simply maintained a rigorous silence until the race was over, and then waited for explanations. If they were not forthcoming, one dropped the owner's acquaintance.

It was in a curious atmosphere of silence, in fact, that the preliminaries of the Hunt Cup race took place. Lord Seaford stood up in his box watching without a word the horses as they came out of the paddock and cantered down the hill to the starting-place; a bevy of friends stood near him, only daring to criticise the action and appearance of some absolute outsider as he cantered past. A long murmur of doubt and vexation and admiration ran down the lawns as The Druid came slowly by, trained to the hour, the most perfect-looking horse in the field. Then came a muttered exclamation from Lord Carstone,—another buzz of excited comment from a

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knot of sportsmen by the railings,—and Lord Seaford's race glasses went up to his eyes in grim silence which no one cared to break. Ridden by the stable lightweight, one of the smartest apprentices at Newmarket, Pamela galloped past; and, watching her, a score or more of men who knew what they were about looked up her colours on their race cards, studied her history in their pocket racing guides, and hurried away to invest a few sovereigns.

No duller race, they said, had been seen for the Ascot Hunt Cup for many a long year past. Soothed and checked by a skilled young hand while half the other horses were dancing frantically about at the post for twenty minutes, and sent flying to the front directly the flag fell, Pamela had spread-eagled her field before half a mile was covered; and as she raced up the hill without hanging or faltering for a moment, no one except people who had backed something to be second or third troubled to look away among the rest of the floundering and beaten field. Halfway up the hill The Druid was pulled right back in total abandonment of the contest; Eiger's jockey followed suit with his horse. A brief uninteresting scurry among some outsiders resulted in Benzoni being second and Stained Glass third; and then a certain portion of the spectators who were "in the know" turned and looked at one another with a smile.

"There'll be some fur flying over this," they remarked with conviction.

## CHAPTER XIII

**T**HE Marquis of Seaford held his race glasses up to his eyes till the winning numbers went up; then he dropped them, and Darcy, who was standing close to him at the moment, retreated hastily with a look on his face as of one who would say: "On my soul it is not I who's got to be murdered." In truth, there was nothing less than murder in Lord Seaford's eyes as they looked round him now, and lighted at last on Whitmore, and beckoned the young man to his side.

"You have something to say to me, I presume?" the elder man asked quietly.

"Have I?" was the sullen answer. "I'm damned if I know what it is. Mercer's worked a first-class swindle, and worked it very well, and what I make by it is the value of the stakes, which is about two thousand pounds, isn't it?"

"You didn't back your horse at all, then?"

"Oh, well, Mercer did tell me half an hour ago that he had put on a bit for me at twenty to one yesterday. He didn't see me here all day, and thought I hadn't come back from Paris, and I tell him always to put a few pounds on one of my horses for me if I'm not there. But I don't suppose the Ring will be much the worse for my

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winnings. And I might have won a fortune over the race. Damn these Newmarket thieves! Damn the whole gang of them!"

"Nothing will ever do you any good, Julian, except a man coming along one day with a horse-whip . . ."

"Seaford . . . !"

"—and showing you what the decent portion of the racing world thinks of a game like this. Do you suppose I believe a word of what you have just told me?"

"What do you believe?" asked the young man sullenly.

"The whole of this affair was arranged weeks ago," the Marquis answered coldly. "You have been bribed or threatened into saying nothing to me about it; you have won a fortune, and I have lost one . . ."

"Have you? Oh, but I say . . ."

"Good God, Julian! What do you suppose I care about that! I'd have given you double the sum I've lost to be spared the horror of this afternoon. What have you won?"

"Nothing. A few hundreds. Practically nothing."

The other turned away with a groan. He would have given the world to his young companion for a full confession. His own frightful losses over the race were genuinely and completely forgotten. My Lord Marquis, who owed Knight sixty thousand pounds, and would have



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to spend long hours in serious business discussions with his lawyers as to possible means of borrowing it, spoke absolute truth when he said that he would have paid double the sum to be spared this supposed discovery of Whitmore's treason. The loss or gain of a small fortune was an every-day event to this mad gambler. A disloyal friend was a discovery which turned all life upside down.

"It's a shame to tell me a lie like that, Julian. It's a shame and a scandal to let a lot of men like Mercer and Leslie swindle me like this. There isn't a story about one of my horses which could put a penny into your pocket which you haven't been told every day since you went to school; in return you help a gang of thieves to rob me, and to do it with a horse named—as you have named this one!"

"Why should that make any difference to you?" asked Whitmore, with sudden fierceness.

The Marquis looked away without answering, and under his dark skin there appeared a small red glow; then he turned his eyes back to Whitmore's face with a long insolent stare. "It's always a pity," he said, "to mix up a young lady's name with—fraud."

"How dare you use that word to me?" asked Whitmore, stammering with passion. "When you talk of my knowing anything about Mercer's plans, you lie; when you talk of my winning money to-day, you lie; and—and—and when you



The Marquis held his race-glasses up to his eyes till the winning numbers went up

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talk of wanting to help me with Pamela I believe you lie again; you lie like the damned hypocrite and slanderer that you are! You never meant me to have Pamela. Either you want Stanier to have her, or you mean . . . or you want . . . ”

An iron grip fell on Whitmore's shoulder. Seaford's face was bent over his, grey and twitching with passion. “Don't finish your sentence! Go, out of my sight! You poor, miserable little swindler, do you think that even a girl couldn't find you out ten times over without asking a single question of any human being! Who would need to slander you! No man could do you a greater injury than by going away and leaving you alone to be looked at by any man or woman with two eyes and a glimmering of decency!”

Cowering under the torrent of furious words—not daring after his first outbreak to reply to them lest he should prolong the quarrel till it reached Pamela's ears, Whitmore turned and fairly fled from the box, while the Marquis stood again at the edge of it, looking down with a hard, defiant stare at the passers-by, who, recognising him, turned their glances of wonder and pity and curiosity in his direction.

For a moment or two the man's iron will held at bay all thoughts of his own personal ruin; indignation at Whitmore's treason, annoyance at the defeat of a favourite horse, vexation at the

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thought that instead of being a popular hero he was probably being talked of as a common gull—these were the feelings which ran to and fro over the surface of his mind, each with their little pin-prick. Then, slowly and steadily, even as a long dull bodily pain rises under pin-pricks, and grows and widens and deepens till it overwhelms and absorbs them all, so the memory and realisation of what had happened here forced its way slowly into Seaford's mind. Wide sunlit lawns, with the slow-moving, many-coloured tide of humanity swaying to and fro on them, turned grey and cold; laughter went out of happy faces; all joy of youth and sunshine were hidden from the eyes of this sad on-looker, to whom fortune had at last dealt a blow which must perforce make even him wince. The climax of horror came when he saw a little group of friends coming towards him from adjacent boxes. He could not speak to them; for once in his life the effort to talk as if he were not quite sure whether he had won or lost half a crown was too much for him.

“Harry . . . it's only us—Biddy and I. We've taken our courage in both hands, and we've come to say we're sorry. You mustn't eat us!”

As Lady Arlington sat down beside him and put a hand on his arm, the Marquis turned to her a face of torture, with eyes pleading passionately for something which she could not understand. Following their direction she saw them glance

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from one group to another of advancing friends; the voices of some of them were audible in the passage before she at last understood, and even as Lady Carstone entered the box she thrust her little ivory betting book into Seaford's hands with a doleful grimace. He looked at it enquiringly.

"Oh, Harry, I've lost such frightful sums that I can't and daren't calculate them for myself! Look down that book for me and tell me what I've lost . . . Dear Lady Carstone, don't speak to him for a moment, he's engaged in some terrible calculations for me which may mean shutting up the Chelsea house and Biddy and myself spending the rest of the summer at Dieppe! Have you lost much yourself? Oh, is that you, Eleanor? Have you come to pour out the usual tale of woe and ruin? Well, we are all in the same box—all ruined, and all searching for sympathy."

"Condole with us, Lord Seaford!" Miss Hamilton pushed her way forward through the crowded little box. "Give us all a tip to put everything straight! Tell me . . ."

Biddy Gilmour interposed her small person resolutely between Lord Seaford and the advancing figure. When the latter continued to advance she put forward her shoulder in a manner studied at her brother's football matches, and wedged it firmly against her opponent's neck. Lady Arlington saw the manœuvre and

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gave her approbation with a barely perceptible nod and smile. At the same moment the Marquis stood up and handed the book back, speaking with a terrible effort, which Lady Arlington could only hope was not as visible to others as to herself:

"I am so sorry, dear lady. You have lost thirty-three pounds."

Nodding her gratitude, Lady Arlington took the book back. There were a good many matters of which she wanted an explanation. It was not very like Harry Seaford, for instance, to put sixty thousand pounds on a horse for a race in which a friend's horse was going to win by any distance. But she could hardly ask questions now.

No questions were, in fact, asked for the rest of the afternoon. The drive back to Beddowes, tea, croquet, tennis, and dinner all passed away in the awkward half-silence which falls upon such a party when there is only one topic on which everyone could be and desires to be fluent, and that is impossible. Whitmore stayed behind on the race course to make inquiries about his winnings; Seaford sent a long telegram to London to arrange for the payment of his losses; and Stanier had the field to himself.

Sir Norman had been a success that afternoon, and was comfortably aware of the fact. Without understanding any details of the business, Pamela realised that there was something wrong about the Hunt Cup result, and that Stanier was

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quite justified in his contemptuous pity for these racing folk. He was above them, beyond reach of their petty passions, pitiful ambitions, poor little dishonesties; and for once the girl was bound to think with him and to admire him sitting up above her world, scornfully ignorant of its mean life. A little movement of respect and liking, coupled with a half-understood feeling of security in his presence and of flattered self-esteem because he liked to be in her presence, stirred Pamela's mind now. It was irritating and unpleasant, she said to herself, to be with people who were accusing one another of dishonesty, who were tainting the whole air with hints about doubtful bets, lies, horses that were not meant to win, and jockeys who were not meant to race at all, but merely to steer their horses into places apportioned to them by their swindling trainer. One could not breathe in such air; one might not talk in it, and barely think in it, for fear of saying something which would give a secret away, or compromise somebody, or make or mar someone's fortune.

Curtly, almost pettishly, Pamela changed the subject when Stanier spoke to her about the afternoon's racing; she must know all about his new book, about the results of his visit to the Heidelberg Library, about the party of German guests which he was to entertain in Derbyshire next month. Who acted as hostess at such parties? His sister? She would like to know his



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sister—would not he bring her to call on Lady Carstone one day next week? Or perhaps Miss Stanier despised people who cared so much for racing and dancing and the silly racket of a London summer? . . . Eagerly, and most untruthfully, Sir Norman protested that his sister wanted very much to know Lady Carstone, and would thoroughly enjoy race meetings if she knew anybody to take her to them. With lowered voice and pretty, hesitating manner, Pamela went on with her facile cajolery; she wanted to know all Sir Norman's friends, as many of them at any rate as would tolerate her—would not he bring one or two to lunch and let her come and meet them? She was just a little wearied, she hinted, of horses and betting books, and though Sir Norman must find her dreadfully ignorant and dull, he was so kind in speaking to her and coming to see her that she was daring now to tell him of these things which she wanted . . .

Did the girl mean her words? Very likely for a moment she was not unwilling to be soothed and distracted by the new world of culture and knowledge which this man wished to open to her; nor had she the vaguest idea of the pent-house of love and passion whose gates were being opened one after another by her light words. Had she known, it is quite possible that this and half a dozen similar conversations would have taken place, all the same, for Pamela loved admiration, fought for it, lived for it, thought of it through-

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out her waking hours. A man's admiring eyes bent on her filled her with little thrills of excited delight; to walk about in a pretty frock and know that a dozen men were studying her graceful young figure and rose-petal face with absorbed, admiring eyes, was like the scented warmth of June sunshine. Since she was quite young she had instinctively done everything in her power to provoke and retain this admiration, and no mother, guardian, or kindly woman friend had ever intervened to warn the girl of risk and peril. In truth, the risk to herself, at any rate, was not very great; the passions of mankind were as open to her eyes as the fashion papers which constituted her only literature, and she studied one and the other with equal knowledge, and with equal skill in introducing variations among their patterns. She knew so much that she had no intention whatever of surrendering herself, of giving up her body and risking her soul to please her grandmother and to release herself from this dull guardianship. Her changes of mind as regards Whitmore were extraordinarily numerous and violent. She was genuinely in love with him one day, longing to be near him, absorbed in all his schemes, passionately excited by his hot eager youth and responsive to all its desires; the next day her nerves were fretted into fever by exactly the same youthful versatility, irresponsible schemes, childish vanity, and sulky jealousy. In the case of

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an older man, she was well aware, all this would pass off after marriage; with the younger man she would have long months and perhaps years of torment and worry, even if his vices were not as radically serious as she herself believed. Whitmore might be, as Lord Seaford assured her, less black than he was painted; but in her private opinion he had too many other points of resemblance to the devil for strict matrimonial comfort; and she had no special desire to reform him. "Never marry a man to reform him," Lady Carstone had said to her once in a moment of candour. "Reform him first and then don't marry him."

And as regards Stanier? To be Lady Stanier, with a big income, famous country houses, the chance, if one cared to take it, of playing the queen in some colony or embassy, with a man near you whose mere presence was rest and security—that was not such a bad thing. Pamela had seen many a score of her contemporaries go out into the world smiling and contented to meet a much less gracious fortune than this.

But if the choice did not lie only between these two? If a third person, once seemingly far off, had suddenly come nearer to her, and all her heart and soul had gone out to meet him,—what then?

## CHAPTER XIV

**P**AMELA CARSTONE was a very just young person, and responded politely, if with a little sigh of boredom, when Lord Whitmore told her tragically that evening that he must ask her for a short time in which to explain to her what had really happened with regard to the Hunt Cup. She walked away with him across the lawn after dinner and listened to his story in a silence which, as he felt throughout his being, gave no consent to a word of it. It was very hard luck, thought the young man bitterly, that this girl should accept his untruthful excuses for a dozen really serious offences, and now refuse to believe a perfectly true story regarding a petty racing incident. Racing incidents, it may be noted, were petty or otherwise in the young earl's mind according to whether he himself won or lost money over them. Details of the most gigantic turf fraud ever perpetrated at Newmarket or Chantilly lacked the slightest interest to him if no money of his own was involved, while honesty became a word of very wide meaning when transactions resulting in his own benefit were concerned. In truth, my young lord could hardly understand any serious reprobation being meted out to successful fraud.

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Yet he was feeling very bitter now. That vague, painful sensation that with Pamela he was one of a crowd, and must make the best possible use of a very brief opportunity, was holding Lord Whitmore with disagreeable force. He could not feel himself to be a dominant personage, whose arguments, pleadings, and excuses must take precedence of all other people's words. Here was a man who regarded himself as the leading actor playing the climax of a great tragedy and worthy to hold the world's interest. Yet at the bottom of his soul he knew that he might not take up all the space, time, and attention of the stage; that the sun would not stand still to look at him, nor the whole earth lament his failure or acclaim his success. His cry of despair in the former case would be lost in the uproar of the crowd which was pushing on to try its fortune; his rejoicing in the other event would be cut short by an indifferent throng who did not in the least want to sympathise with him, but wanted to rejoice, too, on their own account. A man may play only on this world's stage, and that but for a few moments, on condition that for the rest of the day he goes and applauds among the audience.

The young man left Pamela, in fact, deeply dissatisfied with himself and very doubtful as to the impression which he had made. She obviously disbelieved a good deal of what he had

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said; which part, he wondered, and how much? Would not it have been better to compel Seaford to listen to these excuses, and let him pass them on to the girl? Ruefully speculating on these matters as he walked back by himself to the house, Whitmore came face to face with Lord Seaford.

From the drawing-room terrace the Marquis had watched what he supposed to be an explanation and reconciliation between these two. Uncomprehendingly, and very bitterly, he had seen Pamela join Whitmore, walk away with him, walk in and out among the distant trees with this familiar companion, their heads bent together in close familiar conversation. What a fool he had made of himself last night! How ludicrous to suppose that what he had seen then was anything but the spectacle of a child making friends with an old man from whom she wanted help in some childish love story!

He would give it her willingly enough, Heaven knew. He asked for nothing in return except to see the little maid happy with a lover of her own choice, a house of her own, babies of her own, everything else that she might care for. These two had quarrelled last night, he supposed; some old-fashioned, thousand-times-told tale of jealousy and lover's wrongs had come between them; to-night it was all right again, presumably, and there had been kisses and explanations and

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reconciliation . . . It was good to be young, like this Whitmore, and provoke a little lady's sorrows and reproaches, and then kiss her tears away. When one met the youth afterwards, warm and happy and excited from the clinging of his sweetheart's arms and the touch of her lips, one must not be hard on him for little offences against one's self.

"I was rough on you this afternoon, dear lad," said Seaford to the other as they met. He put out a hand and Whitmore took it with a quick glow of gratitude. "I am sure there's plenty to be said in explanation of that race? You were afraid to tell me, perhaps, that there was a chance of my horse being beaten?"

"I didn't know! On my word of honour I didn't know," said the younger man eagerly. "It is odd that you won't believe what I say to-day. When have I ever lied to you? Don't you know the name of every horse and woman and money-lender who has ever got me into a row or out of one? Why should I have kept this dark?"

"Of course. Why should you?" answered the Marquis. "You could have made a fortune by backing my horse; why should you raise all this row by winning with one of your own? It was an accident, my lad; I quite realise that. Unless, of course, Mercer has been playing a game with you?"

"Maybe," said Whitmore listlessly. "Damn

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his eternal swindling! What a fortune we could have made if we'd known about this brute yesterday, and had a plunge on her!"

"And I suppose you want piles of money about as badly as usual?" Seaford asked.

The younger man nodded, and leant wearily against a tree, looking down on the ground.

"You saw Cora was there this afternoon?" he asked. "She nodded savagely to me, and I can see she is spoiling for a fight. Money and threats, money and threats! That's all I hear about on every side now."

"Not from Pamela surely? And what money is wanted just now? Who's threatening you? Send him round to Belgrave Square."

"I'm ashamed of myself, Seaford. You are good to me; you are too awfully good to me, and I'm not fit to live. I was awake half last night wondering whether there is a human being in the world who is the better for my having been alive, and whether I could ever stop counting the people who are the worse for it. Someone should tell . . . I swear, Seaford, it's someone's duty to tell Pamela all about me. I owe a quarter of a million at least; there are half a dozen women and twice as many brats whom I ought to pension off and provide for; and, as you know, I haven't really got sixpence a year to give one of them. Go and tell her. You're her friend, and she likes you fifty times better than Stanier and me put together. Quite right of her . . .



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Oh, damn it all, here comes Lady Arlington. I'm off!"

The stately figure of the hostess of Beddowes was in fact moving slowly down the path, alone, and deep in thought. The thoughts were not apparently very kindly or pleasing ones; an exceedingly stern face looked up at Whitmore as he ran by with some muttered words, and was then turned on Lord Seaford as Lady Arlington caught sight of him standing alone. The woman paused opposite to him. Her hands dropped by the side of her black lace dress, the jewels on her fingers and in her fan handle flashed out in the moonlight; she faced the Marquis with a look of haughty enquiry.

"She has been told part of my story and Pamela's," said the Marquis to himself, shrinking before the look. "Would she expect her old lover openly now to confess this first lapse from constancy?"

"Julian has been trying to explain his Hunt Cup trick, I suppose?" Lady Arlington asked coldly.

"Yes. I don't think there was much wrong about it. It was a commonplace racing fluke."

"And he has been pouring out complaints about Pamela's coldness?"

"Ye—es."

"He chooses strange confidants!"

After the age of fifty one does not affect to misunderstand such words. Seaford stood in stolid

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silence, annoyed, obviously unwilling to continue the conversation, but unable to escape.

"Go on, and tell me, Harry," my Lady asked in her hard contemptuous voice. "Is it true that you are going to make a fool of yourself with this girl?"

"Who told you anything of the sort?" asked the Marquis, speaking bravely enough, since speak he must, but shuffling hands and feet uneasily.

My Lady Arlington looked at the hands and feet and disregarded the speech.

"I have two eyes," she said contemptuously, "and their story has been supplemented this afternoon by two friends. Is anything settled between you and Pamela? Were you telling that booby"—she nodded in the direction where Whitmore had just fled—"anything about it?"

"He was talking to me about his money affairs."

"An absorbing subject, I don't doubt. Now will you answer my first question?"

"The answer to it is briefly, 'no.'"

Lady Arlington's face softened a little, and she stood silent for a moment. The angry vigour with which the word "No" was spoken relieved her somewhat. The idea of this lover changing his allegiance was not to be tolerated for a moment.

"Pamela has a large enough regiment of lovers without your joining it," she said with a

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bluntness of speech unusual to this polished society lady.

“Has she?”

To ninety-nine people out of a hundred, Lord Seaford's voice would have sounded disinterested to the point of boredom. Imagination and affection, however, had quickened Lady Arlington's powers of divination to a very awkward extent.

“Ever since she was born,” said the woman quietly and coldly, “Pamela Carstone has been resolved to get what she wanted out of somebody. Shortly after she was in her teens she realised the fact that her grandmother neither could nor would give her everything she asked for, so she set up her first lover and made him supply all deficiencies. The man in question—poor James Elworth, do you remember him?—really fell violently in love with her, so she was able to keep him going for seven or eight months and have a thoroughly good time. When he proposed to her, Pamela, who isn't a bad sort of actress in her way, was able to affect the most delightful innocence, and to gull everyone into believing that she was a mere child who had never yet heard of a love story nor guessed at the probability of a man being in love with herself. A richer man had come along, you see, and she treated him in exactly the same way. It went on like that till she had realised that a title was a desirable thing as well as money and fun. Then she sent the second person about his business and made

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love to Whitmore, whom she has no more intention, now, of marrying than I have, because she realises that he hasn't got enough money to amuse her. Pamela not only doesn't know, and never will know, what love means; she doesn't know what ordinary, commonplace affection is. She has never in her life said or done a thing with any other object but her own amusement or her own gain, and she never will. She is the sort of person, Harry, whom only women know; who couldn't do the most common act of politeness to a mother, sister, friend, or lover without every woman who saw it wondering to herself, 'What does the girl hope to gain by that?' Her women guardians asked that when she was six; her girl friends asked it when she was sixteen; her women companions will ask it when she is sixty."

"You draw a spirited picture of a very unpleasant young person," said Seaford, trying to laugh, but the effort was not successful. Perhaps, in spite of much sarcastic wisdom spoken and written on the matter, no man has ever listened to a clever woman's criticism of her rival without an uncomfortable suspicion that the damnatory portion of it may have a substratum of truth. Besides, there was something rather alarming about this scheme when it was put into words by a third person. A love story is one matter when it is a romance of whispers, clasped hands, moonlight, and many angry rivals; it is altogether another when a friend, brimming over

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with offensive common sense, discusses marriage and its consequences. Lord Seaford never analysed his own emotions, much less other people's; he had only a vague feeling now that the night was turning chilly, and that Lady Arlington's advice in past years had saved him from making a fool of himself more often than he could remember.

Seaford's first open expression of feeling, as Lady Arlington turned and walked back towards the house, was a heavy sigh. He hardly knew which was the more painful consideration in this world, the well-known price paid for familiar pleasures like racing, or the unknown payments which might be demanded for the vaguer and more thrilling delights with which fate had lately been tempting him.

It seemed to be ordained that on each night a different lover should end the day's work in a state of satisfaction with himself and his progress. To-night it was the turn of Sir Norman Stanier, who said to himself that Pamela's complete disgust with her racing companions was obviously now only a question of time, and had in fact begun sooner than he expected. He need have no scruple in helping Providence to complete it, especially since the girl had so openly shown her liking for himself.

## CHAPTER XV

ON the following morning the majority of the guests at Beddowes woke up with an uncomfortable feeling that a highly complicated piece of mischief was brewing in the house, and that the less they saw of one another the better. Pamela and Lady Carstone, for instance, breakfasted in their rooms, and announced that they would not be down till the carriages were at the door to take them to the race course. Then they crept out by a garden door to take the air unperceived. Stanier talked of work, and Seaford and Whitmore went for a walk.

It was almost in silence that the latter pair strolled on towards the Spring Valley, through it as far as the Ascot road, and then back again. A long way in front of them as they returned, and walking also towards the house, was a figure which made both men quicken their pace as they caught sight of it, slow down again as a doubt arose, then finally decide who it was, and start together in eager pursuit.

"She is going to the house! What is she going to do there?" gasped the younger man.

Seaford smiled grimly.

"Both of us could guess that much. We must stop her."

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"At all costs! Did you know," went on Whitmore, with almost a sob in his voice, "that she saw Pamela here on Monday and spoke to her?"

The Marquis nodded.

"If she sees Pamela again now, your wish of last night will be carried out all right. Pamela will know everything."

The lad flung up his hands and dropped them again in a dreadful abandonment of despair.

"Everything!" he muttered hoarsely. "Everything! Cora means to have no mercy now."

The sound of footsteps behind her reached the woman's ears at length, and she turned round. The men could see her make a movement of annoyance, measure the distance to the Hall, evidently calculating whether she had time to reach it before she was overtaken, and then give up the idea and wait, with scorn and anger written all over her rigid body. She was something of an actress, was this unlucky person, and there was an artistically dramatic touch in the motionless silence with which she awaited the two hurrying men, and studied them with cold expressionless eyes when they stood opposite to her.

"Miss Acland."

For a moment as the Marquis began to speak, and Cora Acland saw his intention of conducting the business on Whitmore's behalf, a gleam of fear came into her eyes; now, as always, she felt that this speaker would stop very little short of murder in dealing with any person like herself;

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she was hardly a human being in his eyes, as she knew very well, only a troublesome animal, to be shot, trapped, or kicked out of the way as circumstances dictated.

"Miss Acland, we understand of course your object in going up to the house yonder; but, frankly, what have you to gain by it?"

"I told Lord Whitmore some weeks ago that I should do this unless he gave me the money which I asked for. I am demanding no huge sum as the price of silence now. I want enough to keep myself and his children from begging in the streets, and that I mean to have."

"He has paid you that," said Seaford in some little bewilderment; "I—I—happen to know that."

The woman glanced from one man's face to the other; then her instinctive grasp of a situation—the instinct which Whitmore had learnt to dread above all things connected with her—showed her the truth.

"You mean," she said to Seaford, "that you gave him the money to pay me. Well, he has used it for something else. He would, you know."

Seaford turned to the young man by his side, whose shrinking figure and twitching, furious face told their own story. Some muttered remarks came about "Another creditor," "Bankruptcy notice," and the Marquis shrugged his shoulders and looked away. What could he do



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more? Nobody in earth or heaven could teach this youth the common laws of decency even as understood in his own world. The Marquis of Seaford was not a particularly honest or respectable person as honesty and respectability are understood in the ordinary world, but he had ten or a dozen commandments of his own, drawn up by himself, with the assistance of the Jockey Club, some friendly money-lenders, and some ladies of the ballet; and he really did not know what to do with people who trespassed outside the wide margin of these laws.

"There has been a mistake apparently," he said hurriedly to Cora Acland. "I'll send you the money myself to-night if you will go home now."

A touch of pity and admiration came into the woman's face as she heard this man fighting for the (purely imaginary) honour of his friend.

"I will go home," she said quietly, "though you perceive—look along the road there—that Providence was inclined to give me my chance of revenge."

"My God, Seaford, look there!"

Whitmore pointed to a garden gate bordering the park road, from which Lady Carstone and Pamela were just emerging. His eyes were almost insane with fear and his words barely audible. Seaford watched the two women's figures for a moment, then turned to Cora Acland with a look of grave, polite enquiry which seemed to

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intimate to her that she was at perfect liberty to take her opportunity and use it to the full, if she would. In answer to which look, Cora nodded to the two men and turned away towards the Ascot road.

“Will they have seen us talking to her?” muttered Whitmore eagerly. “Could Pamela recognise her at this distance? What are we to say?”

Seaford shrugged his shoulders again. Life was getting altogether beyond his powers of management. He could tell a lie as unblushingly as anybody on earth, if need be, but he expected one lie to settle all difficulties. To tell a dozen to a dozen different people without contradicting himself, and arrange for each of them to keep out of the other's way till they had forgotten what he said to them, was something of a bore, and was quite beyond him. Lord Seaford had this much of nobility in his nature, that though he would tell a lie he scorned real falsehood; though he would insult a woman who annoyed him, he would not bully her; and though he would take advantage of any man or woman who made a slip in love or gambling or war, he would not seek any further traffic with the blunderer. He was helping Whitmore now in a sort of royal rage with himself, with Whitmore, with Pamela, and with fate and luck; always having that notion in the background that when he had put his hand to the plough, the plough should not stop

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even if his own neck were under it. Something of this feeling was on his face and in his speech as he met the two women, detached Lady Carstone from Pamela on some plea of asking her advice about refurnishing his house, and so left Whitmore and Pamela together again.

"That was the woman," said Miss Carstone curtly, "who spoke to you in the Spring Valley on Monday. Who is she? What is she doing here again?"

"Oh, she was only asking Seaford and me for some tips for this afternoon. We told her to back Applegate."

"What's the sense of telling me a silly yarn of that sort? If I mayn't know the truth, say so."

"What should there be to know?"

"You may leave me to make my own guesses, if you like," said the girl, who hardly knew whether she really suspected anything wrong or not, but spoke at a venture in a voice full of meaning and knowledge. "Only it would be awkward if my guesses were even worse than the truth."

"If your imagination can make anything interesting out of a woman cadging for racing tips, it must be in good working order!"

"Do you happen to remember that she talked to me a few days ago, and told me that she was here to have a row with someone who had been behaving badly to her? She meant what she

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said, I fancy, and I don't think racing tips were in her mind then, or are in her mind now."

"I'm afraid," said the young man, "I can't help you to find out what is in her mind."

"No? Perhaps the simplest thing would be to ask her myself. She is sure to be on the lawn this afternoon."

"Look here, Pamela, the woman isn't a proper person for you to speak to. I tell you she . . ."

"How do you know that?"

"Seaford and I know everybody in London; but you needn't."

"I'm not going to be put off any more," said the girl, flaming out suddenly into a rage. "I hear things about you here, and things there, and I mean to know the truth about them. Marjorie Ellis told me the other day about some woman who came to see you last time we were lunching with Lady Arlington. Now another turns up—or perhaps it's the same—here. I'm not a six-year-old child, you know. I understand what things like that mean quite well, and I think it is a disgusting scandal that you can't keep them out of my sight."

"Pamela, I'll tell you if . . . if . . ."

Whitmore's racked nerves gave way for a moment and he hardly knew what he was saying. Nothing was in his mind except that at all costs this girl's painfully accurate guesses must be stifled, and her powers of divination turned into a new direction. But first she must be per-

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suaded to keep silence. "I'll tell you the story, though it's not at all a proper one for you to hear . . . I suppose it's true, as you say, that you know all about such things, and one tale more or less can't make much odds to you." The young man was rambling on in a desperate attempt to gain time for making up a coherent story. "I'll tell you everything if you give me your word to keep it all to yourself."

"Oh, I won't tell anybody about you," said Pamela scornfully, but rather nervously. She had not bargained for a full confession. Such tales were amusing enough to read about in the novels, French and English, with which Lady Carstone's house was stocked, but she had never before heard one first-hand from the delinquent, and the idea scared her.

"The story has nothing to do with me," said Whitmore quietly.

"Then you have no right to talk about it," Pamela answered quickly, raising her hands as if to ward off a half-foreseen blow.

"It is Seaford's business," went on the young man quickly: "A rather sad and very troublesome affair out of which I am trying to help him. He has dragged me out of so many mud-dles that it's a relief to be able to do him a good turn myself. And I have a perfect right to talk about it to you while you suspect that it is my own affair, and are going to use it as an excuse for breaking with me."

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Pamela walked on in silence, her eyes studying the ground with absorbed interest, her hands hanging straight down by her sides, her breath coming quickly; and Whitmore stole an occasional glance at her, waiting in terror for words which would show whether she believed him or not, and how she was going to take it.

"You are an awful liar, Julian." The girl's answer when it came at last was spoken in slow, careful tones, as if it required an immense effort to articulate and separate the words. "You lie ceaselessly and damnably to me and everybody else; I should think your first intelligible remark was the name of a horse with a lie stuck on to it. But I suppose you would hardly dare to tell me a thing like that if it wasn't true."

"Ask him," said Whitmore defiantly.

"You know perfectly well that I could do nothing of the sort. I have to take your word for the story. But——"

Pamela's lips shut tight and her sentence finished with a silence which left the young man's brain spinning round with fear in his ignorance of what it meant. Pamela had obviously been telling the truth a minute ago when she had said that she was not a six-year-old child, and quite understood the meaning of such tales as that of Cora Acland, and had implied that she cared very little about them. Why now this silence which spoke of bitter resentment,

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doubt, and misery? There was some difference, perhaps, between such stories told about men of Seaford's age and his own; or told about men who lived for themselves, like Seaford, and men who were in love like himself . . . or told about a man with whom one was in love and another with whom one was not? Well, at any rate, the tale had been told, and Pamela was not likely to ask Seaford about its truth; while Cora would not talk if she had money to-night, as she doubtless would. It had been a tiresome and unpleasant business, the way in which Levi Randall had blustered and threatened so fiercely, that Whitmore had felt obliged to hand over to him nearly all the sum which Seaford had given him to pay off this troublesome mistress; so much, in fact, of the sum that Julian had not thought it worth while to give the balance to the lady, but had spent it comfortably in Paris. However, Seaford had not appeared to mind much when the unpleasant truth came out just now, and he would certainly settle with Cora to-night. It struck Whitmore suddenly that this cheque of Seaford's, sent direct to Miss Cora Acland, would be a very pretty little bit of confirmation of his story to Pamela, if later on it required any. The thought took no very definite shape in Whitmore's mind, but hung there in vague, comforting fashion, like the dream of a lottery ticket holder, or the wide comforting hopes of a man who has seen two

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magpies or put his clothes on inside out by accident.

"So she has seen the woman?" said the Marquis eagerly, directly he was alone with Whitmore. "I caught fragments of her first few questions. How did you explain matters to her?"

"Oh, just told her that it was a woman cadging for racing tips."

"And she believed that?" asked Seaford. "Or did she only say that she believed it?"

"I don't think it occurred to her to doubt the story," said Whitmore, with an easy laugh. "After all, it's a fairly natural thing for a woman to do who meets you and me in the middle of Ascot week."



## CHAPTER XVI

**S**IR FRANCIS ANSTRUTHER was making a great nuisance of himself; so everyone agreed this afternoon, just before the race for the Ascot Cup, when he was trying to persuade people to back a certain two-year-old for the New Stakes. Dandelion must win, he assured everybody; the colt had been tried to give a stone to Cross-fire, who had won the Woodcote stakes at Epsom, and could not lose this afternoon.

His advice was received with the open boredom which mankind accords to "tips" at Ascot on Thursday afternoon. In the first place, one has not come here to win money but to annihilate one's friends with a new and "fetching" costume; secondly, in a two-year-old race at Ascot there are many outsiders and only one prize. So far, Sir Francis had only found two people interested in his advice; one of them, a young lady who was saving up money to get married,—while the object of her affections was saving up money to buy a ticket to Buenos Ayres; but that is irrelevant,—the other was Pamela Carstone, who at an early period of the afternoon had refused to speak to anybody on the course, and had carried out her resolution valiantly until she found

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this man, to whom all her friends and guardians had strictly forbidden her to speak a word. She entrusted all her winnings of Tuesday to Anstruther, who put them on Dandelion for her at 100 to 8; and she stood by his side graciously accepting his congratulations when Dandelion got smartly away and won in a canter by a dozen lengths.

The Marquis looked grave, Lady Carstone furious, and Stanier bewildered, when the girl opened a conspicuous and violent flirtation with Anstruther, which she evidently proposed to carry on for the rest of the afternoon.

"It's revenge on somebody for something, I daresay," said Seaford angrily; "but I wish she'd choose one of my grooms, or a silver-ring bookmaker, or any other comparatively respectable person."

He felt sick and tired and sore this afternoon. The familiar sun-lit scene of the bracken-covered downs, with the little streak of smooth greensward in front of them along which so many famous turf battles had been lost and won, had none of its familiar, entrancing excitement for him to-day. He bet on races, watched them, swore at the result and doubled his bets on the next; and could not think why, at the very bottom of his soul, below the sunshine and the outcry of the bookmakers and the short fierce rush of the horses past the winning post, he felt tired, tired, tired, as he had never felt in his life before.

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A sudden curious craving to be alone, to be quiet, to escape from friends, acquaintances, toadies, and satellites came over him, whereupon my Lord, who never reasoned with or repressed desires of that description, sent for a carriage and drove back to Beddowes. He felt suddenly grown old; the fifty-five years of his life which had mostly seemed to him, whenever it amused him to look back upon them, a wide sun-lit plain where many a score of white stones marked days and hours of exquisite delight, was all cragged and seamed now with debauches of vice and evil and greed; the skeletons of men whose money he had taken from them, and their ambitions and faith and sometimes even honour with it, mouthed and giped at him where the white stones once stood; the souls of women whom he had ruined were sighing there in place of the laughter which he loved. And he was old, old! And next week he must find a huge sum of money—a small fortune with which a better man could have blotted out suffering and brightened a great patch of the grey world—to pay the price of four days' idiotic self-indulgence. Himself and everybody with whom he had come in contact would be the worse for his having lived through these four days. He could look back and see a score of similar racing weeks, each with a great tale of final disaster for men and women who were dependent on him. He thought very little as a rule, and cared less, about any of the systems and laws by which

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the wealth of the world was divided among its inhabitants: to this man broad acres, a famous name, a kingdom and power over men which many a minor sovereign might envy; to another a harsh, unaided struggle, with victory wrung from it at long last only when the young joy of such conquest would never come again; to another the weary, unrelieved battle in which there is no victory nor defeat, but only fighting. But it did occur to my Lord Marquis now that it would not soothe the bitterness of the unsuccessful fighter to glance round in some spare moment at the life lived by the Marquis of Seaford.

"Everything," said Marjorie Ellis once, in an epigrammatic moment, "hurts a hurt person." And to Seaford in his present mood every word and action of the visitors at Beddowes throughout that evening and the next day was an outrage and an offence. Finding that her conversation with Anstruther, begun and continued for the sole purpose of annoying her friends, had been what the expressive French language calls a *succès fou*, Pamela continued it all next day, not the less cheerfully because the gentleman in question was in a vein of luck and assisted her to win a very useful sum of money. As you may see a whole stage drama held up for a few minutes while the fool of the piece cracks jokes and makes love to the servant women, or a great mimic battle suspended while the generals have

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lunch, so the little play of Pamela and her lovers was being interrupted by an interlude in which the heroine was refreshing herself, and the three heroes stood fuming in the wings. Moreover, the former seemed unwilling to come back to business, for Pamela suddenly announced that she and her grandmother were going back to London on Friday evening after the races, having promised, they said, to be present at the Grantham's ball. Two men had expected to leave Beddowes definitely engaged to Pamela; a third had vaguely hoped that the other two would leave after a definite rejection by the young lady; in point of fact all three departed scowling vaguely at one another for no definite reason whatever.

After a brief interview with his lawyers, Lord Seaford travelled down into Cumberland to pay one of his rare visits to his estates. It was not a comfortable way of spending the few days at his disposal. Grey and gloomy, with great yellow patches showing where the stone needed repair, the big lonely castle did not look a place in which any sane man would willingly spend a single hour by himself. As he drove through the lodge gates Lord Seaford noted that one of the chimneys of the lodge had been blown down; the road to the house skirted a long narrow piece of water, dank and stagnant with weed; there was a great crack in the bridge across it, and a corner stone which had been smashed by a cart

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wheel last year was still unmended. The borders of the park road were grass-grown; the railings which shut off the gardens were bent in places and wanted painting; two men whom he passed in the drive touched their hats with a sulky scowl. The servants of the house greeted him with looks of grave enquiry. They were old retainers connected by a hundred ties with the estate, but did not want to stay in this gloomy atmosphere of impending ruin. They waited on here very much as their kindred, dotted about all over the estate, waited on in spite of raised rents collected mercilessly by London lawyers, who answered the most piteous appeals with a writ. Everyone was waiting, though hardly now hoping, for better times.

"The Druid did us all a very bad turn down here, my Lord," said the butler, with morose politeness as he finished answering a few questions about the household, and did not look especially grateful when Seaford, with an oath, tossed him the amount of his losses and told him to stop backing horses. A young farmer met Seaford in the grounds next morning and petitioned against the decree of the estate agent, that his rent was to be raised.

"I'm just married, my Lord, and I quite understood that my lease was to be renewed on the same terms. Doesn't your Lordship remember almost promising me as much in the spring, just after The Druid had won the Lincolnshire?"

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"Good God, my dear chap, and now he has been beaten in the Hunt Cup! How can I afford to remember half-promises of that description?" Seaford asked angrily.

"I refused another farm which Mr. Sinclair's agent offered me at the same rent on the strength of what your Lordship promised me," said the young man coldly; "and one or two arrangements regarding my marriage were made because of the same promise. I did not know that it was dependent on one of your Lordship's horses winning a race."

"Look here, Green," said the Marquis desperately; "you're a bit of a sportsman yourself, aren't you?"

"No, my Lord, I am not," was the curt reply; and Seaford listened to and answered the remaining questions and appeals in helpless, perfunctory fashion. He really did not know what to do with a man who was not prepared to regulate his life by gambling chances. The Marquis had no other satisfaction to offer to his tenants. Whether they would or no, they must "stand in" with his racing stable in its frantic bets, and be prepared to suffer severely and certainly under defeat, and take a precarious chance of gaining something from victory.

After having disposed of Green, and gone through half a dozen interviews of a similar description with other tenants, who were lying in

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wait for him in different parts of the grounds on Sunday morning, the Marquis was in no mood to be polite to the vicar of the parish, who came to him in the afternoon to represent the grievances and sorrows of a few score of village folk and other minor tenants, who were either being threatened with increased rent or with the county court because they could not pay their present dues.

"We are glad to see you among us even for a few days," said the parson. "There are so many matters waiting to be put before you. Your first visit since the racing season began, isn't it? You've been very busy, I suppose?"

The speaker hardly cared to conceal his contempt and anger. He was just back from a visit to Seaford's first cousin and heir, with whom he had been discussing what pressure could be put on the Marquis to sell the Cumberland property. The days of feudal attachment to the head of an old family under all circumstances had long gone by, even in these North Country villages, whose public house bars echoed every evening with curses on the mighty gambler who owned them. The folk here for the most part knew nothing about racing. One or two read such news in their papers regularly in order to note with a groan or rare ray of hope the losses and winnings of the Seaford horses, and they retailed the news to their fellows, who next day had some extra



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sour looks for the estate agent, or a jeering hope in the other case that their rent was now going to be reduced.

"My dear fellow," said the Marquis to his present companion, "believe me, I would help your men if I could, but the whole management of the estate is right out of my hands now."

"Couldn't you spare a month," asked the other drily, "to live here and take it back into your hands?"

"You might not be any better pleased if I did."

"I admit the possibility." The parson had come here for a little plain speaking. "Though we could hardly be worse off than we are now. We should be saved, however, from that rather annoying reply to remonstrances which Mr. Hobart always makes now: 'I'm only an agent; I've got to obey my orders.' I'm sure that you yourself in such a case would want to get at the man who gives the orders."

"Then you must ask those London lawyers of mine to come and live here. It's all their doing."

Lord Seaford was answering more quietly than might have been expected. For the first time in his life he was feeling slightly nervous and inclined to talk cautiously. If he took up this companion by his coat collar and dropped him in the lake, as his inclinations bade him, the villain would only get out and begin and organise and

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encourage a "no-rent" agitation, which the Marquis strongly suspected would require very little encouragement from anybody.

"Frankly, Lord Seaford, I'm here to make a serious remonstrance. The parish is in revolt; it refuses—I am quoting the words of two of my chief parishioners—to pay your losses on the turf any longer. There is not a farm or house in my neighbourhood which does not want repairs,—such repairs, I mean, as every landlord in the country is bound to do for his tenants, and which we could force you to do if we had time and patience and money to deal with Hobart's delays and broken promises. Will you come round and see some of the cases for yourself?"

"What good would that do?" muttered the Marquis, in a surly voice. "I'm not saying I don't believe what you tell me?"

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Nothing. I can't thatch roofs or make gates, can I? And I've got no money to pay anybody else to do it. To repay your candour, I'm just trying to borrow another sixty-five thousand pounds."

"Can't we have some of that here?"

"It's already spent."

The vicar's face and voice assumed a perceptible extra degree of anger and hauteur.

"We must take measures for our own safety, it appears," he said. "I gather that there is no chance of your spending more than a day or two

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here now, or spending any of that time in serious investigation of the estate business. I hope your lawyers will not be unduly surprised if a large portion of the June rents are kept back by your tenants to pay for repairs. Hobart, I expect, will be more grieved than surprised; he has heard rumours of some such intention on their part."

"But I must have the money, you know," said the Marquis, with genuine alarm in his voice. He had not anticipated such a prompt opening of the warfare. The first part of the good parson's discourse had simply worried him; it had been like the ten commandments or the ten minutes before dinner, familiar and inevitable. The latter part was new and quite needlessly unpleasant; also it was not his business to answer it. He paid an agent to listen to the outcries of men and women who were as much vexed as himself by such incidents as The Druid's defeat . . . The easy good-nature which Lord Seaford shared with most gamblers was drowned, as it mostly is drowned, under an incoming tide of misfortune. A little touch of cool, mean calculation took its place, and the Marquis eyed his companion with an unpleasant smile.

"I don't know much about law," he said. "Do you?"

"Lawyers and judges are only men in disguise," answered the vicar coolly. "They will

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listen to reason if you repeat it often enough. I think I must go now. Our interview has ended very much as I expected it would end. You have three alternatives before you, Lord Seaford—to marry a rich woman, to economise, or to sell your property. My own hopes, I regret to say, and the hopes of all my neighbours, are centred on the third alternative.”

The Marquis bade his visitor good-bye, went into the house, drank a great brandy and soda and flung himself down in a chair.

“The betting, I think, is about ten to one on your first choice, parson,” he said to himself.

Thought, like memory, is a troublesome habit which grows on one. In a rash and foolish moment men set to work to cultivate one or the other, and never realise till it is too late how happy they were without either. This man could read a silly novel, listen to foolish chatter, or walk about over all his neighbour’s corns with the tread of an elephant, and forget everything five minutes afterwards; now he must recall it all, and yawn lamentably, and grow brick-red with shame. The other, who could once break all the commandments of earth and heaven as light-heartedly as a drunkard or a madman, must now sit down and calculate the cost, reflect ruefully on the vexations of the treadmill or the gallows, and—most painful result of all—must realise the extremely strong probability

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that the same joyful evil-doing will produce the same results as it did last time. Who would think, if they could help it? Who would choose to remember?

Lord Seaford, for instance, was remembering just now how often he had promised Whitmore his help with Pamela, how he had talked of this help to Lady Arlington, and how completely both of them had believed his words. He was remembering the long, long years when all men had believed his words; he was remembering . . . ah! God! but this was intolerable! With an oath the Marquis sprang to his feet and paced up and down the room, demanding of himself what had gone wrong this week more than any other week, that should cause him to think so much about a few trumpery lost bets. He had actually given his thoughts for five consecutive seconds to Pamela Carstone's money; he had felt obliged for twenty consecutive minutes to conciliate a man on whom, to some slight degree, future supplies of money depended. There was something wrong about the atmosphere of the old family castle; he had never sunk so low as during the twenty-four hours which he had just spent here. — He would certainly leave to-morrow morning.

But before the Marquis left next day, a telegram came to him from his lawyers. The head of the firm, whom he had not seen on Saturday, had presumably returned to business on Monday,

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and had despatched the message without hesitation or delay:

“Quite impossible to procure the sum you mention, this week. When can we see you about it?”

## CHAPTER XVII

**W**HEN Lady Carstone decided that it was time, she took the matter in hand.

She was a managing woman, without any art or skill in management, and won her way, if she won it at all, by sheer hard hitting. Hints and manœuvres were altogether out of her line. If she wanted a thing done by any man, she told him about it, and asked him to do it; if he took no notice, she asked him again; if he declined, she argued, and later on asked him a third time. Then the man found that London was not big enough for himself and an unsatisfied Lady Carstone.

Having lived in the same house with Pamela for ten years, it could not be said that Lady Carstone's tactics were unsuccessful. Pamela "meant business," as we have hinted, wherever her own pleasures was concerned; and would take it over the dead body of anybody who interfered with her. Lady Carstone mostly held and acted upon this same principle. But both of them had sense to arrange that their pleasures should not clash. Since it was improbable in the nature of things that Pamela and her grandmother would want to marry the same man, there really seemed to be no reason why they should

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not live together fairly peaceably to the end of time. The petty bickering and nagging which makes such life almost impossible is quite gratuitous in a large house between two people who breakfast in their rooms, have their own banking accounts, profess no religion, and have discovered that quarrelling is bad for the digestion, complexion, and nerves.

It was from a really honest sense of duty—a most unfamiliar and uncomfortable emotion, in her case—that Lady Carstone took up the tangled thread of Pamela's matrimonial affairs and looked round for a pair of scissors with which to deal with it. On the whole she would have preferred to get the girl out of the house; but long ago she had decided that it was not worth the tempests which such an effort would be likely to produce. Nothing therefore but the strictest desire to do right, coupled perhaps with an idea that the task might, after all, turn out to be easier than it looked, caused Lady Carstone to renew her efforts to "settle" Pamela in life.

Her ladyship had eyes, and used them, and the situation at Beddowes was fairly clear to her. She recognised that Sir Norman Stanier was the most "eligible" of the three men between whom Pamela's mind was wavering; but then the girl would be tired of him in six months, and there would be trouble, in which she herself might possibly be involved. Also, Lady Carstone liked



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Stanier, in mild intermittent fashion, and thought it would be rough luck on him to send Pamela to live with him even for a year or two. He would not beat her, and nothing except that would restore comfort to his life after he had been enlightened and disillusioned with regard to his young wife. And was it so certain that Sir Norman would marry her, after an engagement even of a month or two, during which Miss Carstone would cease to be on her best behaviour and would reveal her inner self with great freedom? Lady Carstone had a little knowledge of the philosophic temperament, which, she understood, asserted itself and reasserted itself at all sorts of convenient and inconvenient moments. Sir Norman was now in love with Pamela, and his philosophy was therefore under a cloud—under a very black one indeed, said the woman to herself grimly. But if the cloud passed away two or three weeks after an engagement between these two had been formally announced to the world, what would Sir Norman do then? You may catch a philosopher like a rat in a trap if the odour of toasted cheese is new and enchanting to his nose, but when the cheese is cold, and the odour stale and unpleasant, his movements are uncertain. The commonplace every-day rat, finding himself in this position, is aware that convention, etiquette, and all the laws of the sporting and social worlds require him to stay in the trap. But the intelligent animal, gifted with

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foresight and calculation, and being aware that drowning, starvation, or a knock over the head hurt considerably, might resolve to escape. Sir Norman Stanier, for instance, after a month's engagement to Pamela would very probably sit down to realise and consider some such future as this, and would then walk out of his trap politely, but firmly; having, it is true, all Lady Carstone's sympathies with him, but leaving her in the meantime in charge of a jilted girl whose temper would be untrustworthy, to say the least of it, for some months to come.

Then there was this newcomer among Pamela's lovers, the Marquis of Seaford. The girl was in love with him; that was one solid fact in the situation. He was ruined, or very shortly would be; that was another. Pamela, it is true, had a fortune of her own which could be settled on herself; but if the Marquis wanted that fortune he would have it, however many lawyers wrote long sentences on pieces of parchment to prevent it. He was one of those persons—not altogether without their use in the world—who reveal to law-abiding mankind the constantly forgotten fact that laws, settlements, contracts, and treaties are nothing whatever but paper splashed over with ink and accepted as binding by peaceable and conventional folk who dislike the trouble of making a row. Lord Seaford wanted to make no row, but if he wanted the money he would take it and leave the other people to make a row.

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if they chose. Lady Carstone, as one of Pamela's trustees, allowed to herself that she would not so choose, having something else to do with her time and money, and harbouring moreover a strong suspicion that if she won her case, Lord Seaford would come round and box her ears. Yet it was quite certain that if the Marquis wanted to marry Pamela he would do it. Did he want to marry her?

When Pamela was a small child she was presented one day with two pears, one large and juicy, the other medium-sized and doubtfully ripe; one for herself, and the other to be given to a child companion who was playing near by. "And as Jim is your guest," said the donor, "you must of course give him his choice between the two." Presently the guest in question was observed to be eating the smaller pear, and this proceeding being strongly at variance with Jim's known habits, an enquiry was instituted into the matter.

"Didn't Pamela give you a choice?" asked someone.

The boy said, yes, she had.

"And you chose the smaller one?" asked the questioner approvingly. "That was quite right."

Jim shook his head. "She gave me my choice between the smaller one or none," he said.

It would be curious, Lady Carstone thought to herself, if at the end of these years Providence

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was arranging retribution for the young lady on these lines, and was offering her a matrimonial choice between Whitmore and nothing. The young Earl was certainly a very small gift, far from unripe, it is true, but very badly ripened and likely to prove extremely sour and unpleasant. Lady Carstone had a quiet and comfortable conscience which rarely did her any harm, but it had given her a very bad time lately, when she thought of handing Pamela over to Lord Whitmore. Her granddaughter had told her all about the woman who had come down to Beddowes, and Whitmore's explanation of this person's presence. The elder woman did not believe a word of it, and cared very little whether this particular tale was true or not. If this scandal was Seaford's story, there were a dozen others belonging to Whitmore; and, however wide-open Pamela's eyes might be, it was a shame to let her walk into such a sink of iniquity as this youth's life without a little remonstrance. Because a person strolls to the edge of a precipice with open eyes one does not refrain from exclamations of warning.

"But at this rate she'll marry none of them," muttered Lady Carstone helplessly at last. "The number of competitors must be reduced by some means to two. Surely then she could make up her mind! If only one of them would die, or go to gaol, or remove himself, somehow!" Presently the story of Cora Acland came back to

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Lady Carstone's memory, tossed to and fro for a few days in the restless tide of her thoughts, and at last seemed to her to loom large in the problem of Pamela's life. Someone had made a statement to the effect that in the affairs of this world an ounce of fact was worth a ton of theory. She would go forth and collect the facts of the situation. As a beginning she would go and see Cora herself. Such persons, to say the truth, amused Lady Carstone, who within the last eighteen months had interviewed two of them on behalf of her grandson, and one on behalf of a friend's son. She wanted now to convict Whitmore of a despicably mean lie, and then to tell Pamela about it; a proceeding which might, she calculated, give a deathblow to the young man's chance. Then she would interfere no further, but leave Stanier and Seaford to fight it out between them.

Miss Acland's address was easily found. Lady Carstone's maid knew Lady Arlington's butler, who knew all things. The young person was in Townshend Road now with her two children. She was in all day and every day, receiving no visitors and going to no places of amusement, but accessible to anybody who chose to go and call on her at any time. One afternoon in the week following Ascot week Lady Carstone went.

The house was a small one, furnished with the costly, inartistic stupidity common to such

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places. There was a lawn in front on which a child was sitting, destroying a flower-bed with a small rake—an unclean, unkempt little imp, with a likeness on its face about which there was no doubt whatever. The question which Lady Carstone had come here to propound had been answered before she reached the front door; nevertheless she went on, and was about to ring the bell when a sound of hurrying footsteps came behind her, and Cora Acland's voice called out to her, peremptorily: "What are you doing here?"

Lady Carstone turned round and confronted the owner of the house with a prolonged, impertinent stare, which was slightly out of place considering the fact that she had come here uninvited, on an errand which hardly rose above mere curiosity. Cora stared back for a moment with all the insolence at her command; then her eyes dropped, her face relaxed into the expression of weary indifference which was habitual there nowadays, and she repeated her question in a bored, indifferent voice: "What are you doing here, Lady Carstone?"

"If you know my name," the visitor answered, "you doubtless guess my business."

"Take a seat." Miss Acland indicated the stone balustrade bordering the front door-step, and herself sat down on the step with her back against the door. "Now, once more, what do you want?"

"You were down at Beddowes the other day,"

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the visitor began in somewhat hurried fashion, for it is difficult to be cold and dignified when you are leaning against a balustrade, talking to someone who is sitting on a doorstep. "Your visit probably had something to do with my granddaughter, Miss Pamela Carstone. I am her grandmother and guardian, and should like to know what your business was?"

"I know nothing more fatiguing on earth," said Cora, fanning herself with a large leaf, "than to be asked questions the answer to which is perfectly well-known to everybody concerned."

"I may suspect . . ."

"You are evidently one of those exquisitely charitable people," said Miss Acland, with a chilly smile, "who believe no ill of their neighbours till it is proved up to the hilt. I shouldn't like to shock such a good-natured, Christian-hearted person by telling my story."

"Let me tell you something which happened at Beddowes, and hear what you have to say to it. Then I will go away. My granddaughter and I saw you talking to Lord Seaford and Lord Whitmore last Thursday morning; and afterwards Miss Carstone asked Lord Whitmore about you. He told her that you—excuse me if for the sake of brevity I talk plainly; apparently you do not want me to stay here longer than is necessary—he told her that you were a mistress of Lord Seaford's who was becoming troublesome to him."

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Silence, prolonged and eloquent; silence which Lady Carstone hardly cared to break for a moment, scarcely knowing what torrent of furious words would come from the woman who now sat opposite to her, a marble image of scorn and rage and hatred. A certain amount of respect came into the visitor's mind. Last time she had confronted a woman of this class on behalf of young Lord Carstone, the lady in question had walked up and down a stuffy, heavily-scented drawing-room, smoking scented cigarettes, and shrieking abuse and demands for money in language of which Lady Carstone understood practically nothing except the amount of the money and the date of its payment.

Yet on the whole Lady Carstone hardly knew which she preferred; at least one knew where one was with a woman who behaved like the latter person, and knew what she would say when one offered her half, and when one proposed to defer the payment even of that until she had given her some guarantee of good behaviour. What did one do when the lady sat still and looked like this?

"Come here, Tommy!" Miss Acland called to the small boy on the lawn, who put down his rake and came to her side. "Look straight at this lady. Stand still. That's right; now run away. . . . I was saying to Whitmore the other day," went on Cora as the boy returned to his work of destruction, "what a nuisance it



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would be for him if I let a creature of that sort run about in Hyde Park, instead of in Regent's Park. The likeness is rather interesting—the sort of thing which puts an end to all further conversation till explanations are forthcoming? It's a bit awkward for Whitmore, isn't it? ”

Lady Carstone shrugged her shoulders with ill-acted indifference. The triumph on her face was quite open to Miss Acland, who got up slowly from her seat and studied her visitor with questioning, wondering eyes.

“You don't want your granddaughter to marry Whitmore? You are going to use me to break off the engagement, if there is one? You want my help for something, perhaps? I wonder why you are doing all this? ”

“You have lived with the man for some years apparently,” said Lady Carstone coldly, “and know him as well as I do, or probably better. Your question answers itself.”

“Yet they say—people whom Whitmore brings here to supper mostly, say that you would give your granddaughter to anybody in London who would take her away from you. The men who talk about her, here, call her intolerable. I've never heard one of them except Whitmore say a good word for her. If you can't get rid of her except to him, why do you like to prove these stories about him? ”

“I think I will go now,” murmured Lady Car-

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stone politely. "It is so good of you to have told me all I wanted to know."

"I think before you go," said Miss Acland quietly, "you may as well tell me what you really want. Whitmore sent a note this morning, saying he is coming here this afternoon to spend a couple of days with me and settle up everything. My help might be useful in your schemes. Tell me what you want?"

Lady Carstone looked at the flashing eyes and quivering throat and hands of the woman standing in front of her.

"What do you yourself want?" she asked curiously.

"Revenge, Lady Carstone," was the quietly-spoken answer. "Heaps of revenge; days and months and years of it; torture, disappointment, ruin, everything horrible which earth and hell could give to a man who has taken me from a home and child, treated me like a vulgar street-woman, and is so ashamed of me now, that he will slander his dearest friend to try and hide the fact that he even knows me. This house is full of his photographs, clothes, letters, jewels and whims; there are two of his children here, and the grave of another one close by; his friends come whenever he invites them, and I entertain them for as long as he pleases. I have been more faithful to him than nine-tenths of the women in your world are to their husbands. Now he comes whining here at intervals, begging

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me to leave him, to hide myself away in some country village and promise never to 'persecute' him with letters or appeals for help. He suggested the other day that Sir Francis Anstruther, some vulgar, swindling friend of his, might 'take me over' if I were nice to him. Do you understand what I mean when I say that I want revenge?"

A dim idea that this was a woman who was talking to her, and not a street plaything, forced its way into Lady Carstone's mind as Cora finished speaking; and some faint outline of probable retribution for Whitmore showed itself in her thoughts. There would be no marriage at any rate between Whitmore and Pamela. What else would happen to this somewhat unlucky youth, to whom fate seemed to have allotted a very moderate span of self-indulgence and a really somewhat disproportionate amount of punishment afterwards? For a moment Lady Carstone felt sympathetic. If Providence took to meting out punishment for wrong-doing on this scale, she and her friends would need a good deal of mutual sympathy and support.

"Perhaps," said Lady Carstone suddenly and irrelevantly, "you had better not say anything to Lord Whitmore about my visit here."

Miss Acland smiled wearily.

"Nine-tenths of my visitors have the same anxious desire for my silence," she said. "I've quite come to understand that people who visit

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me must arrive and depart in thick veils with their hats over their eyes, and send the cab away two or three doors from my house. We are both agreed, then, that the marriage is to be stopped? We shall be useful allies. Tommy won't have any brothers just yet running about in Hyde Park. If he does, you can assure Miss Carstone from me that I shall bring him there to meet them, and introduce him. I shall promise not to as often as I am asked, because Whitmore's friends, Lord Seaford especially, are being most amiable just now and are giving me heaps of money to buy such pledges. But do you know when I get annoyed, I—well, it isn't fair on myself to say that I should break such promises by the dozen, because I should never even remember their existence."

"Such threats are nothing to me or to Miss Carstone. Why do you make them to me?"

"Why are we talking so much at all? You came to find out whether Whitmore was keeping me here; and when I saw you come in, I resolved to find out whether he had spoken to you or Miss Carstone about me after seeing me at Beddowes. Both of us got our answers before you had been here thirty seconds. There was nothing more to be said. Would you like some tea? No? You should answer such questions civilly; I didn't invite you here, you know. Do you want a cab, or is your carriage waiting round the corner, with a footman peeping up the road to find out

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where you've gone? If so, you will have to raise his wages. Good-bye. Tommy, say good-bye politely to this lady. If her granddaughter marries your father, she may be a relation of yours, and give you birthday presents!"

Pamela had left London for a week-end, and Lady Carstone, who had lived in the world too long to write letters without any pressing necessity for such a dangerous proceeding, sat down to wait patiently for her return. She saw her way now to a wedding at the end of the season, with one of two fairly desirable men as bridegroom. Then she would take a comfortable suite of rooms at Homburg, enjoy a quiet "cure" there, go on to Interlaken with her chief crony, Mrs. Millward, spend some autumn weeks at Como, and take a small flat in Paris for the winter. As the programme unfolded itself before her eyes she suddenly realised the fact that if she "let herself go" at this moment, she would admit that she hated Pamela, and was unspeakably thankful to be rid of her. The woman felt uneasily that her self-control was giving way, and that another round of autumn and winter visits, and another spring at Cannes and season in London, with this girl tied on to her, was more than she could bear. As a man or woman fights pain for a time with strung-up muscles and set teeth, and then suddenly with a little cry gives way to it and tumbles down in torture, so

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Pamela's guardian suddenly longed to relax the control which she kept over her feelings, to tell herself openly that the girl was insufferable, and that she would keep her no longer, and slave for her no more. In fact she had done nothing of the sort, but, like most profoundly selfish people, Miss Pamela Carstone had the power, without any words, of impressing upon a whole household of people the belief that they exist exclusively for her benefit and her amusement. It was against this feeling that Lady Carstone, a selfish person of quite a minor order, now sat protesting to herself till she was almost in tears.

## CHAPTER XVIII

**W**HAT do you want me to do, Norman? I'll do anything within reason."

"Will you define reason so that I may know what you mean by keeping inside it?"

Miss Stanier looked at her brother with a glance in which fun and pity and anxiety were mixed in about equal parts.

"Wentworth was fearfully drunk again last night," she said. "No one was ever so afflicted with drunken butlers and footmen as we are. When I reminded him that he had taken the pledge twice this year he said he was 'still a teetotaler, but within reason.' You say Pamela Carstone gambles, but within reason. I say that I disapprove of her, but will be polite to her within reason. We all know what we mean, but none of us what the other means. If you would only tell me exactly what you want . . . ?"

"Be friendly. Go and call on them."

"My good brother! Do consider! Does Lady Carstone often have strange spinster ladies strolling into her house, saying 'I like you, I've come to make your acquaintance?' "

"Can't you meet her at some of these places?" Sir Norman jerked his thumb towards a long line of dinner and At Home cards on the mantelpiece.

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"Go to a few of them to-night; then send a message to me, and I'll come round and introduce you."

"And then?"

"Then we shall know the Carstones properly."

"And then?"

Sir Norman shrugged his shoulders, tugged at his moustache, looked round with a sulky scowl which signified embarrassment.

"For Heaven's sake, can't we know a few people who are just pleasant and amusing without being Dons or German theologians? I want to widen my education a little."

"Well, don't look at me as you used to at Uncle Ilford when he wanted you to go to school at Winchester, and you took up a gun and said you had a right to an opinion about your own education. I daresay I can meet Lady Carstone easily enough. Does she particularly want to come here?"

"She and Miss Carstone would be new people in our circle, which is a foolishly narrow one."

"Miss Carstone sits in complete silence, I am told, till someone starts the subject of gambling; then her conversation becomes, as the Scotch minister said of eternal punishment, 'exceeding abundant, above all that we desire or deserve.'"

"See here, Hilda, you are not displaying your usual omniscience. If I were you, I wouldn't attack Miss Carstone any longer."

A very bitter look came over the pale, elderly



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face which was turned hastily away from Sir Norman Stanier's eyes. For forty years past, ever since she was ten years old, Hilda Stanier had been mother, sister, and tutor to this brother, who owed to her everything which he had in the world of wit, knowledge, and influence. Perhaps she had liked her position well enough, as ruler first of her father's, then of her brother's wealth and houses and friends; but above all things she loved and was proud of the brother himself. It was bitter to surrender it all. For forty years she had played vice-reine without anyone to question a word she said on any subject, and now, behold, *incedit regina*, the shadow of a real queen was appearing on the threshold of these stately houses with their goodly companies of guests, and she must accept dismissal. She must not only accept dismissal without a murmur, but even go out to welcome the new queen.

Hilda Stanier was a philosopher even as her brother. Her younger sister was not, and the latter looked up now with pursed-up, disapproving lips and her head as usual on one side. Miss Phoebe Stanier's head was permanently on one side from her habit of listening to Oxford Dons as if she were resolved to hear and mark and treasure every syllable which they uttered, and never to part with it through life.

"Aren't Lady Carstone and her granddaughter very common, vulgar people?" she asked.

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"No," said Sir Norman briefly.

"They paint and go to races," said Miss Phoebe; and as she was sitting near a looking glass at the time, with her head in its usual position, she had the appearance of considering carefully how she herself would look at Newmarket with plenty of rouge on.

"They also dress and eat and dance and go to church; possibly they also sleep. So far they are certainly common people, or, if you prefer to talk Latin, they are vulgar."

Sir Norman despised himself for his irritation. To be scolded by this sister was like being scalded by weak tea—but the present discussion was inevitable, and he had decided to go through with it this afternoon.

"They will probably be at the Sinclairs' tonight," interposed Miss Stanier hastily. "Mrs. Sinclair knows a lot of racing people."

"Are you both under the impression that Lady Carstone and Miss Carstone keep a racing stable between them, and train and ride the horses every day of the year?"

"It isn't allowed in England on Sunday, is it?" asked Miss Phoebe, with no intention of trying her hand at repartee, but because she liked airing little bits of knowledge, and had a reputation to maintain for saying the most irritating thing possible at the most inconvenient moment with the best intentions. "I remember some races at Dinan, one Sunday when we were there,

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and a jockey who won was brought up to a sort of rostrum and crowned with laurel by the mayor. Dear, dear, it was a very curious way for Hilda and me to spend Sunday afternoon, but Monsieur de Nimes made us come. And at night the winning horses were decorated with ribbons and led round the town in the middle of a torchlight procession, with the jockeys in their laurel wreaths riding them. It was very pretty."

"That happens at Newmarket," said Sir Norman, with savage sarcasm, "every night during a race meeting. Lady Carstone and Miss Carstone are well-known figures in such processions, and the crowd cheers them."

"Do please remember, Norman, that we know nothing about your two friends yet, except that you met them in Lord Seaforth's set, from which we conclude perfectly naturally that they belong to his racing world."

Miss Stanier glanced angrily at her sister and spoke rather sternly to her brother. She thought it improbable that Pamela Carstone's entry into the house could be effected without a good deal of "feeling," but this was beginning matters rather early.

Sir Norman walked up and down the room, wondering with a man's irrational, ignorant anger why on earth these two women could accede to a wish of his with regard to dinner guests, holiday trips and housefurnishing, with

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only an occasional, polite suggestion of improvement, and must then make this fuss about receiving Miss Pamela Carstone into the house. The fact that she was not coming there as a dinner guest, holiday companion, or piece of furniture, and that these two ladies had been promptly and perfectly aware of the fact, and were further perfectly aware—this afternoon at any rate—of the character in which she would come here, did not enter Sir Norman's mind. He had not told them anything.

"Are you kindly taking measures," he asked, "to prevent me being inveigled into buying a stud of race horses, and then being what your friend Baron Espenheim called 'discharged of my money by the bookmakers'? I thought you rather prided yourself"—he stopped opposite Hilda and eyed her angrily,—“on judging people with a little more reason; or at least waiting till you knew them.”

“Poor Father! What would he have said!” murmured Miss Phoebe, glancing up at a portrait of the late Ambassador to Berlin which hung near her. She had hardly meant to speak aloud, and looked up in mild surprise when her brother stalked out of the room and banged the door. From watching his exit, her eyes travelled round the big ugly Portman Square drawing-room, with its huge, heavy tables, bookcases and chairs, its hideous pottery, photograph frames, model of Milan Cathedral in ivory, and what the

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mid-Victorian auctioneer's catalogue described as "pianos and other knickknacks"; she studied them all with an affectionate glance of farewell, and sighed bitterly. It had been a lifelong delusion of hers that she had been her father's favourite daughter, the chosen companion of all his leisure hours, the confidential secretary of his business hours, the sharer of his inmost thoughts, and ally against the argumentative onslaughts of his son and the masterful "management" of his elder daughter. She was reflecting now—but had not meant to reflect aloud—first, that she would have to surrender her share in this comfortable, long-familiar home—which was probable; then that her father would have severely disapproved of Pamela Carstone's presence, which, as Sir Henry Stanier never saw a pretty girl of any rank or nationality without opening a fatherly flirtation with her, and finding added zest in this from the necessity of dodging his younger daughter's companionship, was improbable.

"Can you never," asked Miss Stanier wearily, "refrain from saying senselessly irritating things of that description, which put an end to all rational talk on any subject? Norman must be half imbecile to begin talking to me about such a matter when you are here."

"My dear," said the other with dignity, "I don't think you were able to read between the lines of what Norman was saying. So far as I

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can see, he is in love with this girl, or is on the verge of falling in love with her."

Miss Stanier smiled slightly, checked herself with an effort, but ended by laughing aloud.

"I think that's possible," she said. Her face looked rather pleasant when it laughed.

"We could prevent it going further by a little judicious remonstrance," went on Phoebe, looking up at her favourite picture and assuming its stern diplomatic look.

"Could we?"

"Or, if we refuse to receive this girl, or simply say nothing or do nothing more about her, Norman will perhaps think no more of her. 'Masterly inactivity,' father used to say, 'solves all difficulties.'"

This dictum of the ex-Ambassador (by which, if report spoke truly, he regulated his business so completely that on his retirement it took his successor three weeks to read and arrange the unopened despatches with which his drawers were filled) caused Miss Stanier a spasm of amusement.

"There are a good many ways," she said, "in which we could make idiots of ourselves, but I wish you would put aside for a moment your favourite one of thinking aloud."

"But how is this business between Norman and Miss Carstone to be stopped?"

"Why, exactly, should we invite ourselves to stop it?"

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"Why?" asked Miss Phoebe, aghast. "Why? Suppose he ended by marrying the girl? What should you say then?"

"I should be busy packing up my things here, and doubtless shouldn't say much; but I hope everything I did say would be quite correct."

The younger sister's face became a living, speaking note of amazed interrogation.

"Then why not stop it now while you can?"

"My good Phoebe, since when has it become our duty in life to prevent two people who are in love with one another getting married?"

"Last year," said the other triumphantly, "when George came and told us he was going to marry Esther Martin, you were as angry with him as possible."

"Esther having a thousand pounds in the world," said the elder sister good humouredly, "and George contributing to the ménage about six times that amount of debt; and proposing, as he told us, that he and Esther should live on her money for two years, and then celebrate their golden wedding when they really wanted the gold!"

"But—but——"

Miss Phoebe shook her head helplessly. A love affair in her mind was like a lighted match in the road, or false doctrine in her parish church, something to be stamped upon and suppressed without consideration or hesitation. To be told that two of her acquaintances were in

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love with one another shook her nerve as if she had been told that she was sitting next to two burglars; to overhear love-making made her feel, like another and more famous maiden lady, that she hardly reckoned as a maiden lady any longer. She eyed Hilda, now, with doubt and wonder and reprobation, feeling vaguely and uncomfortably that after fifty years solid and useful wear, her elder sister's ideas of morality were becoming lax, not to say light. Also Hilda had obviously never given any thought to what would happen to themselves if Norman married. She talked, it is true, of packing up, but as if it were a matter of going to Broadstairs for a fortnight.

In her own way, however, Hilda Stanier was more vexed and pained about her brother's infatuation than she intended to admit, either to him or to Phoebe. To begin with, as has been seen, she was very sore at the idea of abandoning her supremacy in her brother's houses. She frankly enjoyed her position as hostess in the ever-crowded Derbyshire residence, and in this widely popular London house. All the eccentricities and notabilities and notorieties of Europe were to be found here during the year; when a foreign prince or famous statesman paid some semi-public visit to London, and had to be entertained by weary officials, she was always asked to take him in charge for a few hours; during the London season men came here with letters of introduction from all four conti-



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nents at the rate of a dozen a day. She herself was a perfect hostess, but she was nothing more, and was quite aware of the fact. Outside Derbyshire and Portman Square she would be nobody; not one out of twenty of the people who had come to her parties in the past would recognise her again, or visit her in the minor establishment which she and her sister must now set up.

Well, it was all rather bitter but quite inevitable. Sooner or later a man like her brother would be caught by somebody, and she ought to be merely grateful for the fact that it had been so much later than sooner. Fifty years, half a century of life, and thirty of them very good years—surely one could not reasonably ask much more of fate. It had not been a philanthropic, world-benefiting life; there had been little religion in it, no hospital-visiting, bazaar-selling, soup-distributing nor Sunday-school teaching; perhaps it would be hard to say, on looking back across that half century, that any man, woman, or child was the better for Hilda Stanier having lived. But no human being was the worse, and it had all been very, very pleasant. The hospital-visiting and due apportionment of soup and baby linen must begin now, she supposed, and continue for the rest of her life; while to Pamela must be transferred those other satisfactory hours. Pamela would fail, said Miss Stanier to herself, once more checking a smile and not allowing it this time to transform itself into a

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laugh. When some long-faithful lover suddenly abandons us and transfers his affections elsewhere, are we glad or sorry—would the sternest code of charity expect us to be sorry—when his new mistress is voted a bore and a failure by all his relatives and friends?

Miss Stanier went to a “crush” at the Sinclairs’ that night, and after a few moments Sir Norman summoned her with beckoning head and raised eyebrows to the side of a very smartly dressed, much-jewelled lady, who would hardly allow the introductory words to be spoken before she held out her hand, saying politely:

“I can’t imagine how it is that Miss Stanier and I have never met before. It isn’t my fault, or her misfortune, but a most stupid blunder of fate. How can we best make up for the lost time?”

“Lady Carstone was kindly asking if you and I would lunch with her to-morrow,” said Sir Norman suggestively to his sister, and eyed her with a little entreating anxiety. He had not seen her since their quarrel this afternoon.

“I shall be delighted,” said Miss Stanier politely.

## CHAPTER XIX

**H**ILDA STANIER and Pamela eyed one another across the luncheon table next day with curiosity giving place to doubt, doubt to dislike, and dislike to good resolutions. The resolutions were very good and very resolute. "I may marry this Stanier man," said Pamela to herself, unhesitatingly passing on a box of cigarettes to her next-door neighbour without taking one. "God knows, I don't; but if I do, I must not and will not have rows with his family; that is what the auctioneer's fast daughter does when she marries the serious parson's son. I will not smoke before this woman, nor swear, nor give her a single tip for the Steward's Cup at Goodwood." And Miss Stanier said to herself equally firmly: "The girl is several points worse than she looked from a distance; she has never opened her lips except to talk about herself and her parties in the most insufferable Mayfair jargon; half the men who were hanging about her last night seem either to be lunching here or to have arranged a meeting with her this afternoon; they are strictly and precisely what the servants' hall calls 'followers,' and she is talking to them like an excited housemaid. Norman may call it affectation, but in

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point of fact she is only affected when she is talking to him or me; she was perfectly natural five minutes ago when she said to that dreadful Anstruther person 'Have done now!' It was meant for humour, but it was herself."

Nevertheless polite promises and invitations were exchanged between Miss Carstone and Miss Stanier before they separated; the latter assured her brother that she had been delighted with the luncheon party, and that Pamela's wit and beauty must certainly make her grandmother's house very attractive to everybody. The woman listened to the glowing eulogy in which Sir Norman answered these words with a gravely sympathetic face, and only a faint twitching of those muscles of the mouth with which a person smiles when so minded. This man was really seriously in love with a girl who, sisterly prejudices apart, was not good enough to marry his coachman; ought one to interfere, and when and how? Would it be considered "playing the game," in such circles, to invite Pamela to Portman Square every day and all day, and incite her to give occasional exhibitions of her real self? She, Hilda, would buy the *Sporting Life* every morning, and invite Pamela to lunch, and draw her out.

The girl came, in fact, a few days later, but was so subdued and grave and polite that Miss Stanier could have beaten her. Pamela had just been told by her grandmother about the

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latter's discoveries in Townshend Road, and the story had hurt her a little. Incapable as she might be of any genuine love for anybody, Whitmore was a familiar, almost lifelong playfellow; and she remembered him coming to see her, a grubby little tear-stained schoolgirl, just after her father's death and her settlement in Lady Carstone's house, and consoling her with philosophy and chocolates; he and one or two other lovers, as Lady Arlington had told Seaford, had been the only ray of light in her grey existence with this latter unsympathetic guardian until she and the guardian had found one another out and become friends. Whitmore had spent untold time and money and care on her through these last years; if she owed him more knowledge of the world than was good for her, she owed him, too, nine-tenths of the pleasure which had come into her life. Pamela had thought of it all as she sat in her room when Lady Carstone had left her; was thinking of it even now while she heard and vaguely answered Miss Stanier's conversation. It was not very much to her; the idea of forgiving a man for his sin because he has loved greatly does not trouble the brains of girls like Pamela Carstone, who merely reflect with admirable self-possession that they have got everything out of their companion which is worth having, and that he must now be sent about his business with as little talk and scandal and vexation as possible. The

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vexation, however, may not be always and altogether on his side. Pamela, for instance, was devoting a whole day to quite genuine regrets at her decision to fling away a friend who had served her faithfully for ten years. And this was the case although she had realised perfectly well some time ago that several other people were perfectly willing, and better able, to provide her with the same pleasures as Whitmore had spent his life, and a good deal of his patrimony, in offering to her.

Lady Carstone came to fetch her granddaughter to a garden party at Durham House later in the afternoon. Miss Stanier drove there with them, and, resolute in her politeness to her new friend, walked with Pamela among the trees and flower beds of the big gardens, and even behaved with tolerable politeness to the crowd of young men who presently began to collect round her companion. Presently, one more unit was added to the crowd; Miss Stanier found herself being unwillingly introduced to Lord Whitmore and being surveyed with astonished displeasure by the young man, who apparently drew the most painful conclusions from this friendship between Pamela and herself. Either by chance or by the skilled manœuvring of some member of the party, Miss Stanier a few moments later was walking into a tea-tent with Anstruther, whence, looking back, she saw that Whitmore and Pamela had separated themselves from all the other

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members of the recent group, and were edging away toward some distant trees.

It was with real alarm and wrath in his soul that Whitmore had taken possession of Miss Carstone, scattered the other men with scowls, and carried her off towards a summerhouse which he knew of in the middle of this cluster of elms. Pamela went with him indifferently; the business had to be got through some time; in the nature of things it would last a shorter time, proceed more quietly, and end less tragically, at a Putney garden party than in a room at home where interruption was less certain. Also, she would be able to go back to tea afterwards, find some other friends more promptly, and manufacture sufficient distraction to enable her to forget the existence of a rejected lover for the rest of the day. For a moment, realising the fact that there would be twenty minutes or so of thorough unpleasantness to go through with a man who had really been very good to her in his time, and had some claim on her gratitude, Pamela was annoyed. The great thing to remember, however, was that he was ruined; Lady Carstone's investigations in Townshend Road and elsewhere had left no doubt upon that point; and there was nothing more to get out of him, no further object in temporising, in putting the man off with vague promises, or in trying to retain any semblance of friendship

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with him. She had not the slightest desire to be needlessly unpleasant to the young man; she would not say one word more than was necessary to expel him finally and definitely from her life; and she would say several sentences of quite emphatic gratitude about the past. Perhaps even she would go home and write quite a pretty note repeating these sentences, and send it to him with his presents,—or with as many of the presents as she could return to him without inconvenience. Several of his gifts had been rather useful and original, and could not be replaced without a good deal of trouble; these she would either forget to return or would tell him that she was keeping them as souvenirs of their long friendship.

Looking back on that June garden, with its trees in their glory of green, and the great old-fashioned flower beds lying under them in radiant, scented circles and ovals and squares of haphazard colour, and seeing herself walking among them in her own brightest, earliest summertime of youth and loveliness and gaiety, Pamela noted long afterwards how it had marked—for a time at least, for evermore perhaps—her life's supreme high-water mark of perfect contentment. For long years before this, she had been exquisitely, well-nigh perfectly happy. In the grey after-time, whose cold, long hours froze her very soul with their dull, leaden hands, she



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looked back a score of times a day and watched every month of these swift-passing, sun-lit years, leading up to the climax of this June afternoon, and stretched out passionate hands, praying to it to come back. There were rain in those days, she supposed, and bare trees, and fog and cold and empty flower beds and empty hours; and it was only a matter of course to be young and strong and well; and maybe she had never actually realised one complete day of happiness while the hours went on moving from sunrise to sunset. Now that the day was over, she stared back with amazed, self-reproachful eyes, upbraiding herself because so rarely had she stood in its glorious sunlight, thankfully conscious of warmth and friends and youth and flowers. It was so cold now, so dreadfully dreary and bleak and dark; and she could realise all this part, could feel every chilly look and curt word of some group of acquaintances who did not like to be seen too much with her nowadays, who wanted none of her wit and beauty, hardly even wanted her money, when it was coupled with the painful notoriety of her name. She could feel all that through and through her nervous, pleasure-loving being; and she had not been able to feel the other. What an ill-managed tragedy life was! How shamefully retribution dogged one's footsteps even for such a succession of trifling faults as were caused by mere consideration of one's self! The Durham House gardens were the last

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step in the rose-strewn pathway on which the sun had always shone. And now in the dark days she must hide her pain. Men and women may not walk about in the resolutely smiling world of London society, showing great wounds and asking for pity; we smile resolutely too, though the wound aches, and aches, and all day goes on aching, and the pain takes away the colour from sky and sea and flowers, takes away the taste from all food and wit and joy.

But now, it was only in bored, uneasy anticipation of a few bad moments that Pamela walked with Lord Whitmore towards the summerhouse among the trees, and let him draw her inside and lead her to a corner out of sight of the lawns, and take her hand:

"Isn't it time for an answer now, Pamela? You promised me an answer soon; and oh, Pamela, that afternoon in the Spring Valley at Beddowes you let me think that the answer would not be a very unkind one!"

"Did I?"

"Yes, yes, indeed. I've never really doubted you much; I never honestly supposed you would have let me hope on for so long and then throw me over at last; but one gets so frightened when one sees all these other men who want you so badly, almost as badly as I do. You do care for me a little bit, don't you, Pamela?"

"Yes. But I'm afraid . . ."

"Afraid? . . . What is it, sweetheart?"

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All the colour left Whitmore's face, and rushed back into it in a crimson flood, and slowly left it again.

"I'm afraid we mean something different by 'caring,'" said the girl. In her infinitely petty mind was a slight feeling of resentment that the man had not poured out a longer and more passionate expression of his love and desire. For ten long years she had watched this love growing, and meant now to fling it a thousand miles away; but she would have liked to hear a little more about it first, to realise with a little less effort of imagination how abjectly and devotedly this man loved her.

"Good God, Pamela, you cannot doubt what I mean by it! I have told you, and gone on telling you, till I was silent in mere terror lest you should hate the sight of me. One says words like 'care for' because nowadays one daren't talk much about love or pretend to mind much about anything. You know I have loved you for years a million times more than anyone in the world; you know I love you now, so that it means the end of my life if you send me away!"

"I'm . . . sorry. I'm really . . . sorry."

"Why do you keep on telling me that you are sorry," asked Whitmore, in a scared whisper. "You don't mean . . ."

"I hoped you would go on being friends without asking anything more. Of course I want to

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be friends with you always. I should hate not to be friends."

"Why do you say that to me?"

Pamela began to feel uncomfortable. A moment ago there had been too little emotion in the man's face and voice; now, too much was coming there. She began to realise very dimly that Whitmore had never, as he said, supposed her capable of fooling him in this fashion, that he had only just begun to suspect it possible, and that when he realised the truth there would be unpleasantness . . . perhaps something more.

For one scared minute she wondered whether this man was really, after all, nothing but a bundle of easily excitable, easily diverted fancies. She grew frightened, and then rude:

"I'm only saying what I mean. I can't marry you, but I should be awful sorry if we were enemies because of that. Oh, now, Whitmore,"—the girl glanced up at her companion, who had shrunk back against a wall of the summerhouse with a look of dreadful terror in his eyes; she watched him curiously for a moment and then laughed lightly, if somewhat uneasily,—“don't be so tragic about it! My good boy, you couldn't seriously have thought that I was in love with you, and I don't mean to marry any man unless I am. Come, forget all about it, and let's go back to tea.”

Her cool, merciless manner had some part of

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the effect that she desired. Whitmore roused himself from the stupor of fear and uncomprehension in which her first words had left him, and came nearer to her with eager eyes and stammering lips:

"You do not mean all that," he asked excitedly, "or you mean it for the moment because something has happened? Somebody has told you lying stories about me . . ."

"Oh, no, no," said Pamela coldly; she did not intend to discuss any such stories. "Nobody has been talking to me about you at all, or telling me anything which I don't know perfectly well. Don't you understand? It's quite simple. I'm just not in love with you."

"But why . . ." The question in Whitmore's mind was why had she treated him like an accepted lover till a month ago, but he could not remember the words in which to ask it. Also it did not seem to matter much. Something must have happened within the last few weeks; and somewhere at the back of his brain was the knowledge of what had happened, but he could not recall it, nor put that, either, into words. Pamela was making slight movements to go away, and on his half-dead brain there was pressing another thought, that he had not nearly sufficient time to deal with this sudden crisis. He had only meant to bring the girl here for a few minutes, to settle the question with a whisper and a kiss before going back, perhaps to

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tell a few friends, if Pamela were willing, of the engagement this afternoon. People might come in here at any moment; minutes were ticking away steadily while he stood unable to argue, unable to think or even understand. And Pamela watched him with growing uneasiness.

"Don't let's go back over the past few years," she said with another laugh, "and ask one another 'why did you say this' and 'what did you mean by that'? Pretty often I don't know what I mean at the time when I say something; and, anyhow, you wouldn't expect me to remember months afterwards."

"You let me believe you loved me; you almost told me so at Beddowes," said Whitmore doggedly.

"Oh, no, no, indeed no!—Perhaps once or twice you looked rather miserable there, and I tried to console you; and you thought more of what I said than it meant."

"Pamela, darling! Darling little sweetheart! Why are we standing here arguing like this? I won't believe that you don't care for me. I won't, won't believe that you really mean to throw me over after we have been lovers all this time. Something's the matter, and I guess what it is. Won't you let me try to explain everything? You wouldn't send me out of your life and end mine for ever by doing it, just for lack of a few words? I feel a fool going on telling you how much I love you; it's such a hundred-

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times-told story; and besides, you knew it always. What do you think all the rest of my years would be worth unless I spent them with you? Don't you know that ever since I met you long ago—I forget when; I forget everything that happened to me before you came into my life—I've hardly thought about anything except giving you everything you wanted in the world? All these other people who come round you now are each of them worth a hundred of me, but they are nothing but week-old acquaintances compared to you and me, aren't they? Pamela dear, do you remember that it was at this very house, at one of your first grown-up parties, that you ran up to me when I came, and said I was the only friend you had in London, and that I must come and stay near you all the afternoon? And I told you even then that I wanted nothing else in the world than to stay with you always; only, perhaps you didn't understand then. I have vexed you just for a moment now? You are angry about something just for to-day? You can't mean to tell me that you are tired of me for always, and want to send me away?"

The love words came fluently, pleadingly, passionately, at last, and for a moment the entreaty in them moved Pamela a little. She remembered so well the summer afternoon years ago in this fair, riverside garden, and half a hundred similar scenes whose novelty—not always pleasant novelty—was made endurable and even hap-

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pily exciting to her by the knowledge that this friend would always be there, ready to come to her side. Through the chilly atmosphere round the girl's heart some vague understanding came to it of the agony of pain and misery which she was heaping on this familiar lover by such treatment of him; for one brief moment the thought flashed through her mind that her own money might be enough to buy nearly all the pleasure which she wanted, and that she liked Whitmore well enough to give up the rest in order to please him. But Whitmore did not see the second's hesitation, did not read the thought which had spent one brief moment in Pamela's mind. His eyes were fixed on her face in half-wild entreaty, but without the power to read anything there.

"I'm really awfully sorry; it sounds silly to go on saying so, but it's all I can say."

The moment of hesitation was over; it had never been a very serious one; and Pamela was herself again. Also she was getting a little tired of the scene.

"I won't believe what you say. I won't believe that this is really the end." Whitmore relapsed into his first, dazed condition; a helpless gesture of his hands belied his words.

Miss Carstone shook herself impatiently. She also was aware that at any moment other visitors might come in here, and she would not only be found alone with Whitmore in a position of which no one could mistake the purport, and be



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laughed at accordingly, but this business would not be finished and she would have to go through it again another day. The last thought made her desperate, and her tone and words alike changed:

"Do you know, Whitmore, I shall get rather cross if you say that again. I pay no attention to any unpleasant stories about you; I don't care a bit for any scandal which I hear about any friends of mine, and I should like to go on being friends with you. But I'm not going to marry you. People marry to please themselves; not to please old friends, nor to satisfy their relations, nor for any other object of that kind. At least I don't. I wish you didn't mind about it so much, but I can't help that. I'm not going to say 'yes' now, and I do assure you there isn't the very slightest hope of my changing my mind. If you worry me any more I shall get angry."

Once again, for one more moment, the girl's insolence roused Whitmore from his stupefied uncomprehension of what was happening. "You would like to come back among the others?" he asked, with great effort.

"Yes, come along," said the girl alertly. "Come and have some champagne to cheer yourself up; you'll find plenty of girls here quite as nice as me to make love to; I daresay there's no one half as pretty as I am, but if you drink enough fizz you'll see two of them, and that will make matters square."

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Pamela's voice faltered for a moment at the last two or three words of her little joke; it did occur to her that perhaps it was rather unkind to dismiss this lover's suit with a laugh and a not very pretty jest; but for the moment she was so thankful to be out in the air again, on her way back to a concourse of humanity, and with this long-dreaded love scene over, that she thought very little about such an uninteresting matter as Whitmore's feelings.

For one more moment perhaps the result was not altogether ill, for the insulting words found their way into the man's reeling senses, and a little ray of common-sense conviction came into his mind that Pamela's loss was not an unrelieved disaster to his life. Then the blind, whirling fog shut down again on his brain, and he could speak and think no more.

## CHAPTER XX

**I**T is a tiresome part, as Pamela knew, of such scenes as she and Whitmore had just passed through, that they leave traces on both parties which cannot at once be effaced, which remain to be read by any and every passer-by. To do Pamela justice it would not have been easy to read from her face that anything unusual had happened. She was talking lightly and easily to Lord Whitmore as they moved in and out among the trees, so lightly and easily that she thought it necessary to say something to him in half apology for her talk. "Honestly, I'm awfully sorry for you, old boy, but it's no good letting everybody here see that we are both miserable, is it? Look as cheerful as you can. That's what I'm doing, though it's hurt me really quite badly to say all that to you."

In spite of Pamela's advice and her own resolute adoption of it, a good many people read the story of what had happened in the summerhouse among the elms, and read it aloud with comments. It is a curious fact—and Pamela knew this too—that although outside folk smile at flirtations in story books or on the stage, they have little but unpleasant remarks and unpleasant names for the men or women who, in real life, extract all the fun and all the benefit, solid

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or otherwise, from a love affair, and then leave the other party in the transaction to his or her fate. Already, even, as one or two people talked of Whitmore's obvious story, Pamela could feel around her a little unpleasant fleeting breath of contempt. "All up with poor old Whitmore, I should say," said a young soldier to Eleanor Hamilton, as they watched the return of the pair from the summerhouse. "Damned pests, girls like that are, clawing at everything they can get out of you till they suspect you're 'broke,' and then leaving you to look like a fool. 'Garrison hacks,' we call 'em in my trade. I know that little beast; she'll never get her claws into me, I'll bet you a fiver; though she's tried once or twice."

"She's a great friend of mine," said Eleanor, laughing.

"Is she?" said the young man. "Don't . . . Well, I was going to say, don't tell her what I just said to you; but, do you know, on second thoughts I really don't much care whether you tell her or not!"

Vexedly aware that people were going to talk over the tale whose end they had just seen, Pamela moved hastily about among her more intimate friends, telling her own version of it; but nobody appeared very anxious to hear these "facts." One of the girls who had listened to Miss Carstone's hinted story came to the irrational conclusion that she was boasting of hav-

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ing had another proposal; one or two more showed some slight surprise, having understood, they said, that the pair had been engaged for some time; one woman, raising her eyebrows in disagreeably marked surprise, muttered grimly: "Rather rough on Lord Whitmore after the past year, isn't it, my dear?" and turned ostentatiously away. Pamela forgot her tea, forgot a little river party which she had meant to arrange among her friends here, forgot everything in the tiresome surprise of such a reception. She was honestly blind to the possibility of herself doing anything wrong, and could not understand wherein this present love affair differed in the public mind from a score of other trumpery flirtations which had ended in rejected proposals. That this latter score had lasted two or three months each, and ended by seriously annoying their male victims for a month or six weeks afterwards, while the other was going to break a man's heart and wreck his life, did not occur to Pamela as a matter of serious importance. Her own heart and life, you see, would remain quite intact, and what else mattered? Also if, for an occasional moment, self-reproach should disturb her equanimity, she could always tell herself that she had been obliged to do this because of the revelations made to her with regard to the Townshend Road establishment. Pamela cared, in fact, nothing whatever about such business; if Whitmore's income had been

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intact she would have been more likely to chaff him about Cora Acland and the two boys than refuse to marry him on their account; but it sounded better to base her refusal on this ground, even in thinking the matter over by herself. Self-reproach was a new and troublesome sensation. Also, to judge by the few comments which she had heard this afternoon, one or two people were going to be so irrational as to condemn her for what she had done, and the Townshend Road excuse might serve to exonerate her from such blame. There were people in the world, Pamela believed, who thought that an establishment of that description was quite a serious obstacle to matrimony on the part of its paymaster.

Mercifully unaware that his face was telling the end of his story to every passer-by who happened to know the beginning of it, Whitmore had followed Miss Carstone's advice and gone to the buffet. Two liqueur glasses of brandy having no effect on his scattered wits, he was pouring himself out a third when the face of a child at his side struck him as vaguely familiar, and he held out a hand in greeting. A human touch was oddly welcome to him at the moment. He held the young hand fast quite gratefully for as long as little Biddy Gilmour would let it lie there, in fact till the eyebrows of the Reverend Richard Trent began to move upwards in disapproval while Biddy stood silent, divided between

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alarm at the eyebrows and instinctive comprehension of why her hand was being held like this. It dawned slowly on Whitmore who the child was. He turned and saw the parson standing by, and remembered the little love tale which he had heard at Beddowes, and to which he too had offered polite words of congratulation. Every reference to it there, every quiet old-fashioned joke which had been used to bring the easy blushes to Biddy's round cheeks, had seemed for a moment to purify the whole room where it had been spoken. Lady Arlington's guests seemed to change all their fashion of talking about such matters when they spoke of this love story. Its presence now, close to him, soothed even Whitmore for a moment. He put down the brandy bottle, and raised his head with an effort to speak a few graceful words and smile a little courteous smile when he found himself being introduced to Trent by the child's shy voice. It took him away for a moment into another world than his own, where honesty and faith and purity mattered more than successful bets, and the question of whether your friends are to be dropped or cultivated is never decided by the most accurate information as to whether they are or are not worth plundering.

"Have you seen Lady Arlington?" Biddy asked, when another silence threatened.

Whitmore shook his head. "I've seen nobody this afternoon," he said absently.

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"One person surely! We saw you . . ." began Trent, willing to establish an understanding with this agreeable companion, but stopping as he saw his sweetheart's eyes fixed on him in stern reproach. "Hot afternoon, isn't it?" he went on in a flurried voice, looking hopefully for Biddy's approbation. "Great crowd there always is here."

The young man saw Biddy's bye-play, and could just flash a little smile of amused gratitude at her before the frightened feeling of bewilderment and incomprehension came back to him, preluded by a sickening stab of pain. He leant back against the table, put out a shaking hand towards the brandy, drank some, and muttered a few words about being obliged to go home now. He did not want to go; he wanted to stay, on some off-hand chance of a last act being played in this dreadful drama, a last act which should bring everything right, and end happily as such scenes should; but in his short moment of consciousness he had realised that he was not fit to be moving about in this London world which knew him so well. Biddy saw it too, and nodded grave agreement with what he said. Though such men as Whitmore, with their strange combination of abject cowardice and reckless criminality, were unknown in her young life, the curious, all-comprehending instinct of her age and sex made her whisper an imperative command to Trent directly Whitmore was out of



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hearing, and a moment afterwards the latter found the young parson by his side.

"I'm just going too," said Trent. "Lady Arlington has got a little steam launch waiting here, and I'm going to take the liberty of borrowing it. Come with me, at any rate as far as Chelsea pier."

"Well, thanks; I don't feel much in a mood to be alone. The London season gets on one's nerves rather towards mid-July, and it's a queer, new sort of brain torture to be by one's self for five minutes. Do you ever feel like that?"

"Well, I'm not very much in London, you know," said Trent; "but I was expecting to be very dull to-night because Lady Arlington and Biddy are off to a concert at the Meltons, where there's no room for me. Are you busy? It would be most awfully good-natured of you if you would come and dine with me somewhere, and take me to a theatre or something afterwards."

"I would, like a shot," said the other, a little, dull ray of gratitude drifting across the darkness of his soul for a moment, because this man was trying to help him and he wanted help so dreadfully badly; "but the fact is I have promised myself three hours work among a hideous mass of unanswered letters this evening, and I mostly try to keep such promises."

"Oh, break this one," said the parson, with an eager persuasiveness which did him much credit,

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considering the fact that he was to have a *tete-a-tete* dinner with Biddy to-night, and to bring her on to Lady Melton's concert afterwards. "People have no right to write letters in the summer, and only the maddest optimist could expect an answer to them under a month."

"Well, do you know, if you will have me, I really believe I will come," said Whitmore; and Trent's spirits sank into his boots. Surely Biddy would have some splendid reward for him to-morrow or even this evening, in return for this obedience to her orders? Yet as the little launch ran down the river, and Trent took an occasional, hurried glance at this vision of a man's soul writhing in hell, he forgot himself and his lost evening in a growing flood of pity mingled with fear. Biddy was certainly right; a man looking like this was not to be left alone if he had anybody worth calling a friend in the world. Wave upon wave of torture and horror passed across the young man's face as he sat in tense silence; his hands were clenched together, then tore a glove to pieces, then dropped by his side in an abandonment of suffering; his lips quivered, and then turned white and blue till the teeth bit down on them in sudden agony; it was with only half-sane eyes that he watched the river running by, and Trent could read the thought which came now and then into his mind as if it had printed itself on his forehead.

"I suppose there's no shop near Lady Arling-

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ton's house," said Trent suddenly, "where I could buy such a thing as a decent shirt? I came up on Monday only prepared for two nights here."

"I suppose somebody in Chelsea does sell shirts," said Whitmore, recovering himself again with a little start; "but hadn't you better go on to the Burlington Arcade? I'll drop you there on my way home to Hill Street."

"Is that where your quarters are?"

"Yes," said Whitmore, "I have three or four rooms in the family house kept brushed up for me; and very dreary it is." His face was contorted with pain again, a score of old plans for doing up the house according to Pamela's many fancies, which he knew so well, running through his mind as he spoke.

Trent read the thought. "Tell me to go hang myself," he said laughingly, "if my plans are getting too troublesome; but, do you know, if there is so much space as that to spare, I have a mind to ask you for a bit of it in which to spend the rest of the afternoon. I must do that bit of shopping, and it seems rather inane to drive back to Chelsea afterwards and then come back to our dinner rendezvous. Could you give me a chair and a pencil and some paper for a couple of hours in Hill Street?"

"I should be delighted," said Whitmore readily. "I tell you I am fairly scared at the idea of being alone for the next few hours."

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So he would not even see Biddy for a few moments after her return from Durham House this afternoon! The parson heaved a little sigh, and said that fate was interfering very brutally with his few days' holiday. What on earth would he find to write about in Hill Street when he had got that pencil? Next Sunday's sermon was already finished, and Biddy might laugh if he wrote her a long letter. And what could he possibly find to say to this companion through a whole evening? Above all, was it not rather hard luck that he, with his limited income, should be compelled to go to the Burlington Arcade and spend half a guinea on a shirt which he did not want?

Yet as the afternoon sank to evening Richard Trent was fain to admit that his little lady had done well in issuing her orders. If imperative duty ever called a man from his holiday, it called Trent now to come and stand by this man, to hold out to him at least some kindly human touch, to let some friendly mortal voice break now and then through these driving mists of torture in which his brain was wrapped. When the two men found themselves at last in the big half-empty house in Hill Street, where the subtle, chilly odour of uninhabited rooms and sheeted furniture penetrated even through the scented heat of a July afternoon, Whitmore dropped into a chair, looked round him with crazy eyes at a score of objects which obviously reminded him

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of what had happened, and then turned his face to Trent, scarcely seeing him, hardly aware of who it was sitting opposite, but with a weak-minded, unconscious, passionate appeal for sympathy written on his strained face and bunched-up figure. The hour for diplomacy and pretended ignorance had gone by, Trent said to himself, and it was time to tackle this man in the straightforward manner which would certainly accord better, the parson reflected contentedly, with his own fashion of thought and speech.

"You seem badly upset about something," he said, abandoning the pretence of pencil and paper. "Is it anything that I can help about? Or perhaps it's something you don't want to talk of? If so, forgive me for speaking."

"You saw it all, didn't you? Little Miss Gilmour knew all about it," said Whitmore; though he hardly knew why he made the latter assertion.

"Well, when a thing's got to be borne, it's sometimes better to stick it out by one's self in silence, and sometimes it isn't."

"Everybody who knows me will be talking about the thing to-morrow. I can't imagine,"—it was frightful to see the rapidity with which every faintest attempt at self-control gave way directly Whitmore began to speak about his pain,—“I can't imagine where I can go to-morrow, morning, noon or night, or for the next week,

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without meeting someone who will want to ask me about it and condole with me."

"Oh, come and stay with me for a week, or longer, if you can put up with life in a country vicarage. My holiday ends to-morrow morning," added the parson, mentally reminding Providence that all these lies were the result of being sent out on a job without sufficient preparation, and that so far, he had done prompt and heavy penance for each of them. "It is rather rough, I know, meeting people when one has been knocked down by something. Lady Arlington always says that what a person hates most of all when he is in trouble is to 'see faces,' to see unemotional eyes looking at him without sympathy, or pity, or even blame, but just curiously. My vicarage is full of defects when I'm talking to the Queen Anne's Bounty people about it, but it isn't a bad little place for a few days' stay, and I should be really delighted to put you up there. Come back with me to-morrow morning?"

"You're awfully good, thanks, but I must give myself another chance. Somebody's been talking slander about me, and I must put that right, and then see if Pamela will change her mind."

"You know Miss Carstone much better than I do, of course," said Trent, speaking slowly and very quietly, in the tone of a strong man coming to grips with his subject; "and you may remind me, of course, that it isn't always reasonable to

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take a young lady's first answer as final; but doesn't it prolong the torture rather stupidly to go on worrying, without a pretty fair chance of success? And isn't it a fact that the young lady in question is—is—is—in love with somebody else?"

Trent had meant to finish his sentence differently. He had tried to find words in which to ask Whitmore whether, in his candid opinion, he was not rather well quit of such a dreadful young person as Miss Pamela Carstone. But even the politest way of putting this question sounded a trifle rude. Also tastes differed in so staggering a fashion that it was conceivable, he supposed, for a sane man to be genuinely in love with Miss Carstone. Moreover, he believed in caustic for open wounds.

The caustic had its due effect on this occasion, and Whitmore sprang out of his chair and walked to the window with fierce, inarticulate exclamations of fury.

"I wanted to ask her that," he muttered, "but I wouldn't do it, because a girl always hates the question if it's true, and wants to scratch you for asking it whether it's true or not. I suppose everyone says that about her, since Seaford and Stanier came on the scene."

"I have certainly been told so."

Whitmore walked up and down the room, and round it and across it in every direction, muttering crazily, while Trent repeated his invita-

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tion, briefly, at intervals. The other stopped short in front of him at last and shook his head.

"I can't come. I must know the truth about her to-morrow more certainly, or I shall go mad. Let's come out somewhere and see somebody and do something. I feel stifled in here."

The two men walked to Trent's club, read evening papers, and at last sat down to dinner together. Whitmore drank till the other with a good-natured laugh and words of kindly apology refused to order any more wine; then a sullen, evil light came into the guest's face, and after two or three cigarettes he got up to go away, saying that he had promised to see someone towards ten o'clock that evening.

"I'm not going to leave you, you know, till you've settled down for the night; I've told you that several times," said Trent, sternest resolution showing itself under his polite smile.

"Come along then," said the other recklessly; "it's a long drive to where I'm going, but the fresh air will be good for us."

Trent did not hear the address given to the cabman, and did not know London well enough to recognise Baker Street, Regent's Park, or the probable terminus of such a journey. But among the men at Beddowes during Ascot week he had heard something about the establishment in Townshend Road; and as he caught sight of the name of the road now, he turned to Whitmore with a look which the latter misread:



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"I didn't want you to come, you know. You insisted on coming with me. Certainly you had better not be seen at the door of such a notorious house, but I didn't want to bring you here."

"I mean what I say." Trent leant back in the hansom to hide the disgust on his face: "I'm going where you go. Only . . . is your love for Pamela Carstone worth nothing more than this?"

"I want to forget, just for a little while," muttered the other.

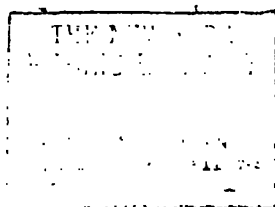
"It isn't a very brave desire," said Trent quietly; "I should have thought you had more courage. Will it be more easy to talk to Miss Carstone to-morrow if you come straight to her out of mire of this description? I don't want to preach. I'm not here to preach. Biddy sent me to take care of you through the day and evening, because you looked frightened and unhappy; and I came very willingly, as I hope to God I would go anywhere to help a man over a very rough bit of pathway like this . . ."

"Well, you'd better go back now," said Whitmore through set teeth. "What would Biddy say to see you here?"

"Tell me to stay till my business was done," said the parson, with a curious little vibration in his voice. It was horrible to him to hear his baby sweetheart's name mentioned in such a scene, but no good would be done by showing



Lord Whitmore's crazed eyes were hopelessly unable to take in the meaning of the little parcels



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such horror. "I don't want to preach, I tell you, but just consider as a matter of common sense what good you do by coming here. Don't you know what a girl's instinct is? Have you never been amazed by the way in which it can discover everything? If you go from here to Miss Carstone to-morrow, do you think she won't know exactly where you've come from; and will she like you any the better for it? Is it worth while to risk what may be a lifetime of happiness for an hour or two of self-indulgence?"

There was a long silence while the cab stood in front of the door, and a blind of the house was drawn aside by Cora Acland to see why it was standing there. Then suddenly Whitmore's hand was put up to the trap-door of the hansom and the man was told to drive back to Hill Street.

The drive passed in silence, Trent not wishing to risk anything by speech, and Whitmore having sunk again into lethargy. The two men sat together in Hill Street till past midnight, and then Trent got up to go; and Whitmore, who had drunk half a bottle of brandy, said that he was going to bed. He shook hands with the other at the front door, saying a few formal words of gratitude, then locked and barred the door, and looked round him with something like a sigh of relief. He was glad to be alone for a time.

A dozen letters and two or three parcels were lying on the hall table, and he turned them over indifferently, till the handwriting on one of the

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parcels caught his eye. With a muttered exclamation of astonishment he recognised Pamela's writing, and tore open the parcel; it was something she had sent to him before going to Durham House perhaps; one of her rare gifts; she could not really be so utterly indifferent to him as she had seemed this afternoon! The man's shaking hands could hardly tear open the paper; his crazed eyes were hopelessly unable to take in the meaning of the half-dozen little parcels which he found inside, and he undid one after another, staring at the jewels and the oddly familiar objects which tumbled out of cases and boxes. He had to read the girl's note, short and clear, and decisive, before he realised that these were his own presents—or a few of them, at any rate—and that Pamela had written to him repeating her words of this afternoon, and adding that, for the present at any rate, she thought it would be better for him not to see her again, even in friendly fashion.

With a furious oath Whitmore ran to the front door, unbarred it again, jumped into a passing hansom, and drove back to Townshend Road.

## CHAPTER XXI

**Y**OU telegraphed saying you would be here at ten to-night," said Cora Acland sulkily, "and it's nearly one o'clock."

"I couldn't help it."

"Was it you who drove up here about ten, and waited outside for a bit, and then drove away again?"

"No. What on earth should I do a thing like that for?"

"No? What have you been doing all day? You don't look particularly brilliant. Do you want anything to drink?"

"Yes, give me a brandy and soda . . . Doing? I? Oh, nothing particular. What should I have been doing?"

"Something particular I should have said myself; but doing things isn't much in your line, is it?"

Whitmore looked round him, with the appeal of a hunted animal in his eyes.

"I am like most men," he said with a resolute effort to speak lightly, "and prefer doing what I can do best. I can sit still longer and better than any man I know."

"Certainly I have seen some very fine efforts of yours in that direction."

"Oh, yes. When the sun's out, give me a

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comfortable chair in a quiet garden and I'll sit still against any man or woman in the kingdom for any wager you like to mention."

"For Heaven's sake, try it. I believe it's the only method on earth by which you could make or win money; and I want some."

"And, when I've won the wager, I shall spend the proceeds in buying his 'pitch' from some Neapolitan beggar, and pass the rest of my life sitting on the edge of the pavement killing insects and sleeping, while a small boy howls for pennies for me. If I took Tommy out to Naples with me I shouldn't have to hire a boy and should soon be a millionaire."

Miss Acland laughed in the exasperated fashion of a woman who wants to tell an offender some home-truths about his life, and is forestalled by the offender telling all the home-truths himself.

"Do you know what really made me leave my husband and set up here with you?" she asked, putting her elbows on the table and her face between her hands, and studying the man coldly. "Partly—it was a very small part—I was in love with you. You were rather good-looking in those days; you are still, you know, except on the days when Pamela Carstone has been telling you her candid opinion of you—that's pretty often lately, isn't it? Then you look sulky and ugly as you do to-night. But my chief notion at that time was that you were going to be a great

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politician, with a famous stud of race horses, and heaps of money, and a name known half over Europe; and that I should be a Foreign Secretary's mistress, or something of that sort, with young diplomatists buzzing round me bribing me to find out State secrets, and parsons hanging about asking me to get them bishoprics. That comes of reading Ouida's novels and French history books, doesn't it? "

" Yes. We've muddled our lives rather badly, you and I, haven't we? Perhaps at the time, I thought that too. I half fancy that if someone had been behind me, kicking me very vigorously when I was on the lower steps of the ladder, I might have got to the top of it. Well, the dream's over now. I—I'm sorry, Cora, I'm sorry for myself, and for you, too. But there's always sleep, and the night dream's quite as good as the day variety, and much better than any reality. Isn't it bedtime now? "

The woman rose from her seat with an exclamation of contempt, and began to fling her clothes off in sullen silence. Whitmore sat on at the table, pouring himself out more brandy and soda, and looking down into the glass long and steadily as if he saw there some of the future which this companion had been describing to him. He rose at last and sat on the edge of the bed, the woman standing still suddenly and looking down into his eyes with a curious fear creeping over her.



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"What are you thinking of now?" she asked suddenly in a low, scared voice.

"Years ago when I was in Brittany," Whitmore answered in an equally low voice, "I was prowling about some village churchyard there, and came on a tombstone which had got only one word on it: 'Miserimus.' That's Latin, you know, for 'most miserable.' I asked some old chap about it, and he said it was on the grave of a man who had lived for some years in a chateau close by, and who had ordered the word to be written there when he died. No one in the place knew anything about him at all, so you could imagine anything you pleased. I imagine . . . just myself; just my own life as it ends to-day. What do you think?"

"I daresay you're right . . . very likely . . . What do you mean by 'your life as it ends to-day'? Are you proposing to shoot yourself in the course of the night?"

"It would be undignified, wouldn't it, to die with a box on the ears as one's last earthly sensation? And that's what you'd give me if I let off a pistol so that it woke you up."

"Probably. Have you proposed to Pamela Carstone at last and been sent about your business?"

"Not yet, but I daresay that fate is waiting for me if ever I do propose to her. I've been dining with a parson, so one naturally thinks of tombstones and the end of the world. By the

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way, the man in question was Richard Trent of 'Beddowes. He's engaged to be married, and is staying just now at Lady Arlington's house in Chelsea, where you came to see me one afternoon. He's rather a good sort. I advise you to send for him whenever you feel inclined to repent and become virtuous."

No sleep came to Lord Whitmore that night, not even a moment of unconsciousness or indifference to fate, not one atom of forgetfulness of any word spoken during the afternoon, of any plans which he had made for the future, or of the ghastly wreckage in which they now lay. No dreams could be dragged into his brain; pictures of real life, past, present, and future, crowded it instead, and he had to study them. The night was insufferably hot, but he hardly noticed it; the bedclothes and pillows were as if they had been heated in an oven, but he lay very still, hardly noticing them, seeing and caring for nothing except the pictures which passed before his eyes, now in a slow procession, now in great stabbing throngs. He was a person who lived in a vague, foolish land of day dreams, always with one big, impossible scheme paramount in this fool's future, but with half a score of others waiting to be thought of, and added to, and glorified, when the chief one got a little uninteresting. Now there was nothing. Pamela had been mixed up with them all, and Pamela was gone, and there was nothing in the world to

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dream about or hope for. Anything else which the world could give him now would be savagely ironical aggravation, as if a doctor, coming to tell you that you were dying of cancer, were followed by a lawyer with the news that you had a million pounds. Presently, a passion to sleep, at any cost on earth to sleep, to buy for any price two or three hours of oblivion, became the one paramount necessity of the night, and Whitmore got out of bed and went to a dressing-room where he kept provision for such emergencies. In a locked drawer in his dressing table he found the little tube of half-grain morphia tabloids, and shook one of them out on to a piece of paper, and swallowed it, and prepared to go back to bed. With any luck the dose would give him a couple of hours' sleep, and then . . . and then . . .

My Lord Whitmore put the little tube down on the dressing table, moved away from it a step or two, went back and took it again into his hand, holding it close to the candle and counting the tabloids in it. There were ten left, a dose of five grains, a dose which . . . What on earth did that matter to him?

He emptied the little white discs on to a piece of paper and looked at them with a smile on his face. What an extraordinary thing, to know that if one swallowed those it would not matter any more what Pamela said, what money-lenders said or did, whether horses lost or won! All the fever of life would go on burning, its tears

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would go on falling, its pains and weary days and disappointed hopes and long, long heartache would fill God's horrible earth with their dull voices, and you would see and hear nothing of them! The one little white thing which he had swallowed would give him a few moments of rest, a short sleep whose dreadful waking he could picture in its every moment. He loathed and hated pain, hated it with a morbid, savage intensity, with weak-minded nervousness when it was coming near, with childish, hysterical passion when it had seized him; and the whole future was one wide desolate level of pain, right up to the horizon. He could not traverse such a piece of ground; in his bravest and most hopeful moments he could only have lain down, and hidden his face, and trusted that when he looked up again the ground would be covered with fountains and trees and pleasant places. Such hopes now were too idle, even for his foolish brain, When he woke in an hour or two it must be to face a hopeless dawn, to fight his way through a hopeless day—he who had never faced the pettiest crisis in life, who would fling about money and friendship, and break half the laws of God and man, to escape a threatened pin-prick!

He moved away from the table again for a moment, went and looked at a photograph of Newmarket on the mantlepiece, came back and turned over the morphia tabloids with his little

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finger, muttering words over them in a slow frightened whisper; the words were quite incoherent till Pamela's name came among them, then he began to repeat the entreaties which he had poured out to her this afternoon, and as he muttered them over he moved towards the window, and drew the blind aside, and saw that the dawn which he feared so abjectly was already breaking.

It was no moment for further thought, he said to himself; thought meant fear and hesitation. He walked quickly back to the table and swallowed the little bundle of tabloids, muttering an impatient exclamation because they hurt his throat as they went down. Then he drank some water, put down the tumbler, looked round the room in dull, wondering fashion. Really it was inconceivable that such a noiseless, simple deed as this could have any very startling result? He might sleep for a little longer than usual; surely nothing more? He could feel nothing whatever . . . no; there was not a shadow of any unusual sensation coming over his brain or body . . . not the slightest sensation. If he had any new feeling at all, since he looked upon the dawn a minute ago, it was one of slight foolishness. On the off-chance of something happening—of the morphia making him seriously ill next day, and of Pamela hearing about it—he would write to her now. He got a sheet of paper and a pen, addressed an envelope to Pamela,

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wrote a few lines saying that he could not and dared not believe what she had said a few hours ago, that he felt frightfully ill and hardly conscious of what had really happened, that for the sake of past years she must let him come . . . The pen began to waver a little, the words to become blurred.

Ah, Lord God! Lord God Almighty! what was this stifled, horrible feeling which was coming into his throat, choking it as if a man had seized it with a great, rough hand and were throttling him? . . . The room turned black dark, then blazed with vague light, with sheets of cold, thick, yellow mist whirling round it like fog in a suddenly rising winter wind. His heart stopped beating for a moment, then beat on again in blinding, suffocating throbs. He fell on his knees against the table at which he had been writing, and stretched out blindly towards the pen, trying in his last moment of consciousness to add a word to Pamela's letter; he found it, could hold it for a moment, could just see the sheet of paper, but his hand could form no word, and a moment later he could see nothing. For one more second, consciousness remained to him—returned and remained in such clear, vivid fashion that he knew exactly what he had done and what was going to happen, and was able even to make a deliberate choice whether this last moment should be spent in a prayer to Heaven for the mercy of which he stood in such

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fearful need, or in a last thought of the earthly love with which he had passed his life. He even had time to hesitate for a perceptible period before choosing Pamela and then groping with blind hands for the paper which held her name, and on which he might at least write "good-bye." . . .

In the far-off land to which an hour later the pitiful world-weary soul set out on its journey, one wonders whether even that moment of hesitation shall be counted as having made some claim for mercy. When you have carried a man's brief span of years into the land of eternity, and deducted from it all the long hours over which he has no control nor choice of hate and grief and aching limbs and murdered heart, there is not so much left, but that half a second of clear, conscious thought should count for something with the Judge who understands, and suffers long, and is merciful.

## CHAPTER XXII

**E**NTREAT you to come at once. Lord Whitmore died here suddenly last night. Cora Acland, 130 Townshend Road, N. W."

The telegram was brought up to Trent with his shaving water at eight o'clock, and he read it with a frightful shock of self-reproach. He guessed what had happened; it was his fault for leaving the man last night. He had been told by Lord Whitmore to go at last, almost pushed out of the house at the end, and it is not easy to insist on sleeping in another person's house against his will; but this man had been madder at the moment than half the lunatics in Hanwell, and it was shameful for even a chance momentary keeper to leave him. Punishment had certainly come to Trent himself, for he guessed, too, that Cora, having heard about him from Whitmore last night, was telegraphing only to him, and would leave to him the task of telling all Lord Whitmore's friends. It was with a feeling that he deserved his fate that the young parson jumped out of bed, dressed and asked to see Lady Arlington at once.

My Lady received him in her dressing-room, where Biddy was already reading her morning letters to her. A great silver bowl of sweet peas



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stood on a table near the child, and some blossoms of the climbing rose tree which crept over the windows were being blown inside by the soft morning air, flinging their scent into the cool white room.

"Parishioners dying?" asked the elder lady, glancing at the telegram in his hand, "and you're going back to Ascot at once? Don't believe him too easily, Biddy! I daresay Mrs. Mathers is bringing her daughter to lunch with him again to-day!"

"It's something frightfully serious, I'm afraid," Trent answered gravely. "I think Biddy had better run away."

"Run, Biddy. Now." Lady Arlington glanced up crossly at the telegram. Since that talk with Lord Seaford in the garden at Beddowes a month ago, when his long years of devotion to her had appeared to be suspiciously near their end, she loathed everything to do with Pamela. "I can guess what it's about easily enough. Biddy told me yesterday's part of the story, and I suppose this is the end of it. What's the worst?"

"The very worst of all, I'm afraid." Trent handed her Miss Acland's telegram. "I blame myself bitterly for having left the poor chap last night."

Lady Arlington read the message and put it down with a look of great awe and pity.

"So it's killed him! Who could have guessed

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it. . . . He looked quite strong. Would it be a weak heart, do you suppose, or what was the matter?"

"I hope to God it was that," said Trent, with such agitation in his voice that my Lady sat upright suddenly on the sofa and stared at him with quick, growing horror.

"Do you mean . . . you think . . . "

"He was perfectly well when I left him last night. I thought the worst of the shock was over. I never should have guessed he was a man to care so much."

"Nor I. That vile little cat! . . . "

"Ought we to blame her?" asked Trent soberly after a pause. "I suppose a girl has a right to tell a man she won't marry him?"

"My good Trent, don't be an ass."

"Flirtation hasn't become a sin yet under any moral code that I know," went on the man excusingly, "and even if it suddenly becomes a serious matter to the man, and the girl then tells him to go away, does anyone blame her very strongly? There will be some dreadful scenes over the affair, if what I hear is true, and we must take great care to be just to everybody, friend and foe, from the very first. Forgive me for lecturing you; I'm paid to do it, you know!"

"I will be as just as I can," said the woman grudgingly; "but the friendship of Pamela and this poor boy wasn't flirtation. She has told Whitmore every day for five years—not in words,

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I daresay; does Biddy talk to you only in words?—that she's in love with him. She has taken his presents and given him more, taken all the fun which he has offered her and asked him for plenty more; everybody has seen them together everywhere, and chaffed them about their love-making and kisses and their plots to meet one another in this place and that. Half our world supposes they were engaged, and is wondering ruefully when the wedding invitation cards will signal the last moment for buying presents. That's not playing the game. These are the tricks of a plundering ballet girl, not of the ordinary flirt. If you are going to espouse her cause in our world, you'll have to beg mercy for Pamela Carstone, not justice."

"It's what most of us will have to beg for, one of these days," said Trent rather absently. He stood by the window thinking in awed wonder of the lips which had stammered out their misery to him last night, which had met this girl's lips once in eager kisses, which, a few hours ago (he hoped and prayed), had been asking for pardon and pity in their last agony, and were now for ever more shut and cold.

"I suppose you'd better go now," said Lady Arlington, with a little pause. "Women of this sort,"—she took up the telegram and eyed Cora Acland's name with angry scorn—"unhappy wretches of this sort only have two ideas when a tragedy takes place anywhere near them; to

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send for a parson and a policeman. You will probably find the house full of police when you arrive. Do you know, I think you'd better take someone with you, if you can. You hardly knew him, did you? And you know nothing about any of his people. Seaford . . . no, that won't do. My God! Seaford will take this hardly."

"I should like someone with me, that's the honest truth; but as there isn't anyone available, I'd better go. Don't tell Biddy more about this than you can help, will you?"

With his spirits not greatly improved by Lady Arlington's hint that he would probably find himself in the middle of a police affair, Trent drove away towards Townshend Road. Crossing Portman Square, chance brought him face to face with Sir Norman Stanier just starting out for a morning ride in the Park. Knowing him only as one of the recent guests at Beddowes, and ignorant of the position in which he stood to Pamela, and through her to Whitmore, Trent told him the news and asked if he saw his way to helping him.

It was in vain that Trent studied the face of this man who now got into the hansom with him, and drove with him in almost complete silence to Miss Acland's house. Stanier had nothing to say, as he told the young parson gravely, till he knew the facts of the case. Speculation in such a matter was a very idle and unprofitable business, he said; and Trent felt duly snubbed.

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The Inspector of Police, who met them in Townshend Road, of course put the matter beyond doubt in a very few words, and expressed his sincere gratitude to the two men for their presence. Trent would be required, it was to be feared, as one of the witnesses at the inquest. What for? Oh, because it was understood from Miss Acland that Mr. Trent had spent the previous evening with the Earl of Whitmore, and could doubtless give some necessary details about his Lordship's state of mind. His Lordship had once or twice, it appeared, taken small quantities of morphia; but last night, from the evidence of Miss Acland, who knew of the existence of a full tube of morphia tablets in the house, the whole of which the Earl of Whitmore had swallowed, it was evident that the case was not one of accident, but of deliberate suicide. Otherwise very few witnesses would be wanted at the inquest; which was satisfactory, said Mr. Inspector politely, since of course it was a very painful matter in the case of families such as that of the Earl of Whitmore, to be obliged to give evidence in these cases. Fortunately, however, there seemed at present to be no necessity for any witnesses except Mr. Trent, Miss Acland, the doctor who had been summoned this morning, and—and—Mr. Inspector consulted a paper which he held in his hand—oh yes, of course, the other was the Hon. Pamela Carstone. The deceased nobleman, Mr. Inspector understood from

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Miss Acland, had been engaged to the lady, and he was in fact writing a letter to her at the moment of his death. He was in the middle of a sentence, indeed, when the morphia began to take effect.

"How do you know the letter was to Miss Carstone?" asked Sir Norman Stanier roughly, speaking for the first time; and the Inspector explained that an addressed envelope had been found lying by the letter.

"Is there no way out of that? She's a very young lady, and her evidence would be extremely painful to give. Can't you . . . Faugh! let her be called! What does it matter to anybody!"

Sir Norman's first words caused the police officer to decide that whatever witnesses were missing at the inquest the young lady in question must certainly be there; his concluding sentence brought a moment of wonder whether it might not be better to summon the speaker too. Trent, too, eyed him in astonishment, wondering at the bitterly scornful tone and contemptuous words. He saw the look of speculation and doubt in the officer's eyes, and came to the sensible conclusion that the less time both of them spent in this house, and the less they said there, the better it would be for everybody concerned. He heard Miss Acland's story for himself, muttered a few commonplace words of condolence, explained to her coldly that, as she had already

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sent for the police, there was nothing for him to do, and departed with Stanier.

"Seaford is going to Newmarket to-day," said the latter abruptly, as they got into a hansom. "We had better go straight to his house now."

"You will see him?" asked Trent nervously. "You know him, of course, better than I do, but—but——"

The speaker eyed his companion with doubt and incomprehension. He seemed to be suppressing a fearful amount of excitement, and Trent began to wonder whether his association with Whitmore was closer than had appeared at Beddowes. But Stanier would speak no word except to give the briefest possible answers, mostly evasive, to the younger man's questions.

His agitation had grown to such a point, when the two men reached Belgrave Square, that he could not speak when they were shown into the small room where Lord Seaford was at breakfast. Its single window looked on to a small garden where the summer sun was glowing over beds of tulips and scattered bushes of red roses. Looking back afterwards on this tragic morning, Trent could only remember its surroundings as a mass of summer flowers, and in their midst men's and women's faces first smiling in friendly summer greeting, and then struck cold and stern and old.

Seaford rose now from his place with a jolly welcome to the visitors, an offer of breakfast, and

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a joke for Trent about a recently vacant bishopric.

"But my influence is no good; there are no sportsmen left in this country who'd match a race-horse against The Druid with Winchester for the prize! If you could persuade—— I say, you both look rather glum. Anything wrong?"

Seeing that Stanier could not speak, the parson told his news, and the man standing before him shrank and turned grey and seemed suddenly to be a hundred years old.

"But . . . I loved him! He had spent all his life with me. I loved him!" The Marquis repeated helplessly, as if fate had overlooked this fact for some unaccountable reason when apportioning Whitmore's lot. There was a long moment of silence, and then Seaford asked stupidly: "He saw her yesterday? My dear lad saw her and asked . . . but I don't understand. He would have come to me if he had talked to her of that, and she had said 'no.' Why did he kill himself? My God! I don't believe it. He got hold of an opiate—I was always telling him to leave them alone, and he's heavily asleep still. Did you see him? Pooh, man! You should have had more sense. A doctor's always imbecile and out of his mind with terror when the police come near him. I'll go and see about it myself."

"They have made quite sure of course, Lord



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Seaford," said Trent sadly. "The dose was an enormous one. There was a letter to Miss Carstone which I understand leaves some little doubt about the matter, though I was not actually shown the letter, but——"

"The accursed girl has killed him! By God, I'll wring her neck this morning. She's not fit to live."

The man's face was lit up with a passion of rage fearful to look at, and Trent shrank back in amazement. He had always thought that Pamela Carstone was a friend of Seaford's; last night he had gathered from Whitmore himself that Seaford was a rival of his with Miss Carstone. According to the young parson's vague ideas of the social world of London, the elder man would be pleased at Whitmore's removal.

Apparently he was not pleased. So far as Trent could gather from the passionate exclamations of rage and love and pity which came from the Marquis as he walked up and down the room, he may have cared for Pamela, but he loved the other with all his heart and soul. In the mind of a man like Lord Seaford, absorbed in the busy world of racing, with its open-air life on Newmarket Heath, and its little concourse of trainers, jockeys, bookmakers and stable lads, a woman is hardly, in truth, a necessary part of the scheme of existence. One lived out of doors among those other beings, talked to them, calculated with them, laughed or swore

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with them, praised, blamed, and rewarded them, cuffed their heads, dined with them, and passed a contented evening telling or listening to stories in which they had played a part. But a woman in the midst of this racing life was—in Lord Seaford's eyes, at any rate—an unmitigated nuisance. Even when one went home in the evening and told her all about it, she did not understand, nor would sympathise adequately with your grief when the Cambridgeshire favourite fell lame, or your triumph when your Derby colt won a trial. Probably, on the contrary, she wanted to talk about a new frock which her dressmaker was designing for Ascot Cup Day, or to ask your sympathy because she was going to have a baby or the cook had given notice. And of all the men whom Seaford loved to live with, and take about with him in his journeys from one race course to another, and back to his training stables at Newmarket, and thence up to London, just to hear what was said in Pall Mall about certain rivals' stables, Whitmore was easily first. The boy was weak in mind and body, and Seaford was strong; he was poor and Seaford (though he heard contradictory reports as to whether he was or was not a rich man) always had plenty of money; Whitmore clung to him, believed in him as a god, consoled him on a hundred days of misfortune with ready sympathy and boyish faith. My Lord Marquis liked Pamela better than any girl he knew, but he would have sacrificed her, body and

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soul, to save Whitmore a real week of trouble, and he would have seen her and every woman friend he had in the world dead ten times over sooner than this fate should have happened to the boy whom he loved as men love a favourite son. He spoke the truth, so far as he understood such matters, when he told himself some weeks ago that he was in love with Pamela; he spoke unqualified truth when he told Trent this morning that he wanted to wring her neck.

"Someone has got to tell Lady Carstone and Miss Carstone," suggested Trent hesitatingly, after a brief interval of silence.

"I shall go and do that now," said Stanier, speaking for the first time since he had entered Lord Seaford's house, and his hoarse voice scarce reached his companions' ears. "I have something else to say to her."

The other two men turned sharply and looked at him. His face was blue-white, and wet with perspiration, and drawn into a score of extraordinary lines of torture and passion.

"You shall not go," said Trent, speaking suddenly and sternly. "Neither of you shall go. You shall not outrage this unhappy girl, now, with your reproaches and unreasoning rage. Do you think there is anybody in all this misery-haunted city to-day who will be half so miserable as she will be when she understands what she has done? And you two men would go and add a lot of bitter recriminations to the scene which

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must take place when she hears of it! For shame!"

"Somebody has got to tell her at once," said Stanier, his shaking lips hardly able to form the words. "The story will be in the evening papers, and on newspaper placards in the street, in an hour or two."

"I am going myself," said Trent, with a little shudder and a half-appealing glance at Seaford, as if even now he would ask him to be merciful and help; then he suddenly braced himself up again and confronted the two men more sternly still: "I shall beg Lady Carstone," he said, "not to admit either of you to her house to-day."

"You shall go alone," said Stanier, almost in a whisper, "and I will promise not to see Miss Carstone, on one condition—that you take a message from me to her, and give me your word to repeat it faithfully."

"What is the message?" asked Trent, eyeing the passion-distorted face distastefully.

"Tell her I have realised suddenly, for the first time in my life, how people like herself treat men who care for them, and that I am going abroad to-morrow, and will never willingly see her or speak to her again."

"And tell her from me," added Seaford, "that for her own sake she had better keep out of my way for a year or two. If you will repeat that straight and honestly, I'll stay away too."

"I will take your messages," said Trent in a

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low voice of intense scorn. "I did not know that, in any part of the English world, men lived who could send such words to a woman in bitter distress and sorrow. But perhaps to take your messages would be worth the price of keeping you away from her till she is more fit to be knocked down than she will be to-day. Now I will go."

## CHAPTER XXIII

MISS CARSTONE woke up on the morning after the Durham House garden party with a luxurious sense of relief permeating her brain, and communicating, even to her body, a delightful sense of rest and freedom. Not for weeks past had her bed felt so cool and comfortable, the room so fresh and airy, or the tea tasted so refreshing. An unpleasant task, which had confronted her eyes every morning for the last month, was successfully accomplished—accomplished thoroughly and completely, too, with all its remains swept up and thrown away; for, having half an hour to spare yesterday on her return from Durham House, and being anxious to get the business finally off her mind, Pamela had made up that parcel of Whitmore's presents and sent it round to him just before dinner. She had begun a note full of pretty regrets and sorrow and hope for his friendship, but had suddenly reflected that meetings with him in the future would in fact be a very great nuisance. Her grandmother, who knew the financial position, present and possible, and the relationships of every man in London whose income reached four figures, had assured her again this afternoon, while driving home and discussing the

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summerhouse story, that there was not the remotest chance of Whitmore either earning or being left a ten-pound note. Therefore Pamela had torn up her first note, and written the shorter and cooler one which Whitmore had read. The story was finished, the work done, the tale told without the faintest possibility of another page being added; and no great mischief had been done to anybody. Pamela told herself that she deserved a generous reward, a large and unusually thrilling treat, a "spree" of quite imperial dimensions, for her successful labour; she felt like the furniture-removal people at her brother's place in the country who had just sent in a bill for moving some pictures up to London, which set forth and charged for every item of the cost and then wound up with: "In General: A Troublesome and Risky Job: 7/6."

Eleanor Hamilton dropped in on her way to Marlow for a day on the river, and sat impatiently eyeing Pamela's maid, who was doing the young lady's hair.

"You look very pleased with yourself this morning," said Miss Hamilton critically. "Was the Arbuthnots' dance any good last night?"

"Yes, quite unusually good; or perhaps it only seemed so after that dreary concert at the Meltons'. Did you ever see people stuff music down one's throat so furiously! There wasn't a moment to speak a word to anybody. Twice,

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Grannie and I made a bolt directly some dreary piece was finished, and had to sit down again halfway across the room because someone else began. And there wasn't a funny song in the whole programme."

"Wasn't there? Nor even a funny person near by to make jokes about the other music?" asked Eleanor absently. She had not come to talk about last night's party, and watched the maid's slow movements with an impatient frown.

"Funny! I had some unknown, imitation-diamond-bespattered old woman on one side of me, and the new Mrs. George Callender on the other, the girl whom you and Carstone used to talk to at Hayes', when something had to be done with her, on the alphabetical principle: 'Have you been to Athens? Do you like Bees? Do you keep a Cow?' and so on. And she's more solemn than ever."

"Why, how . . . is she on the go still?"

"Rather near the 'gone,'" said Pamela, with a laugh. "Grannie says it must be due next month, and told her that if she was so deadly serious about it all the time, it would be twin bishops. They are going to spend the winter in Paris, she and George and presumably the baby."

"Will you and Lady Carstone be there this autumn?"

"Oh, probably. Grannie does love a good time, you know, and nowadays when fewer and fewer people every month dance with her, she



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gets awfully sick of these London entertainments—as sick as an American girl I heard at the Arbuthtons' last night. A man asked her if she would dance, and she said: 'You bet! I've sot and sot and sot till I'm most rooted.' Thanks very much, Nina, that will do. Will you bring me my breakfast up here on a tray?"

"Are you quite certain to be there in the autumn?" asked Eleanor, with meaning.

"Oh, quite. It's so long since Grannie and I went and painted Paris red, that it must be getting quite pale pink by now. We are sure to be there for six or eight weeks before Christmas."

"Nina's gone," hinted the other girl, with a laugh.

"Well, my dear,"—Pamela stood up and shook herself and laughed back—"there really isn't much to add. You saw for yourself what happened yesterday. Why on earth can't a man in real life hide his feelings, as girls do in real life and men do in novels. 'No mortal could have guessed from Sir Percy's cold, proud face that he had just heard his death sentence from Angelina's lips . . . ' You know the kind of thing. I do like that person who said once that open wounds ought to be shown only to surgeons."

"Was the answer final and irrevocable, or is he just to wait till you see whether Sir Norman Stanier will come to the point?"

"My good girl, Sir Norman will come to the

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point whenever he is told he may. I have just been introduced to his family, as I told you, who have taken me to their breasts—or shall we say their hearts? ”

“ You gave the youth no hope whatever? ” pursued the other, with a tone in her voice which implied some disbelief. “ Forgive me for being so persistent, but I’m really rather interested. You see, you’ll be my sister-in-law in three months and three days from now! Also, I shall be asked a good many questions.”

“ Not the slightest. There are three of the solidest reasons on earth against it. The first,—well, we’ll pass over the first for the moment as she isn’t a pleasant subject and your time is short; secondly, Whitmore’s stoney-broke; thirdly, I’m not in love with him. Such exciting things happen in the world that I don’t like to take my oath I shall never marry him, but just now the thing’s a moral impossibility.”

“ A moral impossibility,” suggested the other girl, “ is an immoral possibility.”

“ Are you in love with him yourself, and trying to find out what chance you have? I assure you, you have every chance, so far as I am concerned. Go and console him by all means. I give you my blessing.”

Eleanor Hamilton glanced at the clock and rose from her seat with an odd little look, half wonder, half dislike, at her friend. Her question had been answered, and on the whole she

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did not want Pamela to marry Lord Whitmore. But . . .

"Good-bye, my dear, I must fly. I have taken my oath to be at Paddington at ten, and Thompson always makes a row if he must drive at more than six miles an hour. I wish there might be a law prohibiting any trains before lunch; they are the curse of my life. You may thank Heaven that you haven't got a crowd of brothers always clamouring to start on journeys in the middle of the night, so that you can never have your bath or breakfast quietly. What's Whitmore going to do, by the way? The Rocky Mountains? The Amazon? Or something further off still?"

"Goodness, my dear, how should I know? . . . Is this Nina with my breakfast? Yes, thank Heaven. I do hope there are fish cakes . . . I'll tell you a parting secret which sounds rather brutal, so don't tell it to all my best friends—he couldn't go too far off to please me. Rejected lovers are a bit 'off' in the middle of a London season."

There were no fish cakes, but there was a ham omelet which met with Miss Carstone's warm approval. Then Nina managed to discover that she was in pressing need of a new hat; and Miss Carstone, who loved shopping above all things, and had a great and especial affection for trying on new hats in the presence of a group of obsequious and complimentary shopwomen, spent

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another half hour in deciding the details of what was required to match, if possible, two dresses and a coat. She and Nina had frankly abandoned this task as impossible, and had decided to limit themselves to a hat which should live on friendly terms with one new dress, when a card was brought up to the dressing-room. It bore the name of Inspector A. G. Morell, of Scotland Yard, and there was a message to say that the visitor would like to see Miss Carstone for a few moments.

"But didn't he ask for Lady Carstone?" demanded Pamela, in bewilderment.

The housemaid referred to the footman outside, who was quite certain that the visitor had asked for Miss Carstone.

"Very well. Say I will come down. And, Ellen,"—the girl looked nervously about her, and turned to the housemaid almost appealingly—"find Tallant, if you can, and ask her to take this card to Lady Carstone, and to tell her that I am with the man and should be rather glad if she could come to me."

The housemaid looked doubtful. It was almost a criminal offence to disturb Lady Carstone even by a message before mid-day without express permission, and she had no intention of getting herself into trouble to oblige this young lady; but she departed without actual refusal, and Pamela went downstairs.

The searching eyes which studied her when she

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came into the room looked rather kind, but frightened Pamela none the less on that account; they said to her that there was dreadful news to be told, and that they were sorry for her.

"Miss Pamela Carstone?"

"Yes. It is I you wish to see—not my grandmother, Lady Carstone?"

"It is you, yourself. I have a letter in my pocket addressed to you by—by the Earl of Whitmore."

The girl's face blazed up with a look of the proudest indignation and amazement. "Surely Lord Whitmore is capable of sending his letters by the post or by more ordinary messengers?" she asked. Then her mind fell back into a very whirlpool of bewilderment and terror. "You have something to tell me," she went on. "You could hardly have come here with messages from Lord Whitmore to me. I—I would rather you saw Lady Carstone, or at least waited till she came here to me."

As the girl spoke, a footman came into the room and gave her a message in a low voice. Her face turned very white as she heard it; she nodded in reply, and stood for another moment with her eyes fixed on the door, by which Trent presently entered. Pamela muttered a hurried greeting to him, saw Morell interchange a grim nod with him, and then turned back to the Inspector.

"Lady Carstone cannot come down," she said, "but this friend of mine will perhaps stay with

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me, if you are able to talk of your business before him."

"Mr. Trent knows my business very well," said Morell gravely. "And probably he thinks it rather needlessly quick work on my part to be here now. But to tell you the truth, sir,"—with a half-turn of the head towards Trent,—“I didn't like the look or the language of your friend in Townshend Road when I spoke of Miss Carstone's presence being required. We cannot permit her to be warned and carried off; she must be present to-morrow."

"Townshend Road!" exclaimed the girl, her eyes flashing with rage. "What is this about? I refuse absolutely to hear another word."

"Lord Whitmore met with—with—an accident there this morning," began Trent hurriedly.

"I don't care!" The girl was moving towards the door, white with rage, and Trent saw the police officer move quietly round and stand against the door to prevent her exit.

"He is dead, Miss Carstone," blurted out the parson, seeing that at all costs he must force her to remain here.

"I don't care in the least," was the furious answer. "Let me leave the room, please."

"He committed suicide in Townshend Road this morning, and left the beginning of a letter to you, of which this is a copy," said Morell, feeling that he and Trent were a very tactless pair, but feeling also that he must not leave any doubt

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in this girl's mind as to what was required of her.

Stretching out a hand which shook with passion, Pamela took the sheet of paper and glanced at it indifferently. Only two facts were in her mind, that Whitmore had seen spending the last twelve hours in Townshend Road and that she herself was being practically held prisoner here by a policeman. She was almost out of her mind with terror. Something had happened—she did not care and in truth had scarcely heard and in no degree understood, what it was—which was going to involve her in some case with which the woman in Townshend Road was also mixed up, and such cases mostly got into newspapers. It was her grandmother's fault for going and seeing this woman; it was Whitmore's fault, and just like his selfish carelessness, because he had gone straight to his house from her; it was Lady Arlington's fault for allowing this meddlesome chaplain of hers to be mixed up in such a business. Pamela Carstone could have killed them all cheerfully; she would have laughed aloud with delight to hear, at that moment, of the death of all the people whose names had just passed through her mind. If one of them had died already, so much the better; there was one person the less to involve her in such maddeningly horrible drama.

The girl leant against the wall, setting her teeth and clenching her hands in a desperate ef-

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fort at self-control; if she moved again or spoke another word she knew that she would lose every atom of power over herself, fly at the door, have a fearful scene with the police officer and find herself, at last, the centre of a gaping crowd of servants, and possibly of other policemen. She was vaguely conscious that Trent was speaking to her, was taking the letter out of her hand and reading it, was saying something in low-voiced and rather indignant remonstrance to Morell, who answered curtly, in words which reached her ear without touching her brain: "Letter or no letter, there is not the slightest, conceivable doubt about the suicide."

"But what do you want with the young lady?" Trent asked impatiently.

"I must ensure her presence at the inquest. I am sorry to speak so plainly and act so quickly, but the fact is, sir, it is you and your friend who have driven me to do this. I suspect him, and you too, since I have met you here now, of wishing to prevent the young lady's presence when we need her. You've gained nothing by pointing out the perfectly obvious fact that this letter does not prove deliberate suicide. On the contrary, any doubt thrown on the case prolongs all the investigation of it and makes the presence of this young lady the more imperative. Miss Acland, for instance, is already under surveillance, and if I seriously doubted the suicide, I should arrest her on a charge of murder."



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Trent's face was nearly as white as Pamela's at the end of Morell's statement. He studied the man carefully, and saw that he was not one of the *sauve*, omniscient, silent detectives of fiction, who are invisible and politely speechless till they are in a position to arrest everybody connected with the crime; but an honest, active, blundering, English policeman who had probably successfully run to earth and introduced to the gaol, or the gallows, quite as many criminals as the gentleman in the novel, and had been deservedly promoted for so doing. His whole soul suspected complications of fraud and crime in this case; he knew nothing and was guessing wildly with regard to its motives and inner workings; and had merely come to the sensible decision that every man and woman involved in it must be kept, if not under lock and key, as nearly so as possible, till the affair was settled. Trent began to have some perception of this fact, and of all that it involved for himself and others of Lord Whitmore's friends and acquaintances.

"I can assure you very positively," he said, feeling, however, that his words were idle, "there is not the very faintest reason for your suspicion. My presence here has no such object, and I'm quite positive that Sir Norman Stanier had no such idea in his head either."

"Who?"

The word, which was almost a scream, came from Pamela, and Trent turned to her in fresh

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bewilderment. He understood a little, but very little, of the way in which her mind had been working since he arrived, and did not realise that the introduction of every new name into this tragedy was another shock. Nor, of course, could he realise that the introduction of this name was the worst shock of all. He only saw now the girl's face livid with rage, and her eyes with murder in them.

"I really think Lady Carstone had better be sent for—had better be told imperatively that she must come at once," said Morell. He had gained his object, and seen his witness, found out that for the present at any rate she had devised no schemes of escape; and noted the further fact that her departure from London would now be a matter of a few hours if she got the chance.

"I will fetch her at once."

Trent left the room, and Pamela sank into a chair, trembling in every limb, and looking up at Morell in dumb agony, wanting to ask him a hundred questions because, under this last shock, her paralysed brain was beginning to recover some measure of consciousness, but helplessly unable to put them into words.

Morell read the first and most vital of them on the miserable, young face which was looking up at his, and answered it.

"Sir Norman Stanier came to the house just now with Mr. Trent, and left with him."

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"Just now . . . ? The house . . . ?"

"To Miss Acland's house early this morning. She telegraphed for him."

Mr. Inspector saw new life coming back into the girl's face, and began to see his way to a little useful private cross-examination.

"And—Lord Whitmore? You say he's dead, in—in—this woman's house?" Miss Carstone hesitated for a long moment, and the Inspector eyed her curiously. "Are you perfectly certain it was Lord Whitmore?"

"No, miss."

Pamela sprang to her feet with a little cry, the colour coming back to her face, and light and life to herself; very much as the Inspector had proposed by his words to bring them there. "Then what on earth——" she began angrily.

"Is that the Earl of Whitmore's handwriting?" Morell asked, giving Pamela the original letter of which he had previously shown her the copy.

"Yes, yes . . . It is the same as . . . What does all this mean? It is the same letter in another handwriting."

"You had seen the Earl of Whitmore on the previous day? Do you remember what took place at the meeting?"

"It was purely private business between ourselves."

"You will be obliged to tell the story at the

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inquest, and it might save you some trouble to tell it to me now."

"He asked me to marry him and I said 'I couldn't . . . Do you mean to say,'—Pamela's voice sank again to a terrified whisper,—“do you dare to tell me that you will drag me into a court and make me repeat all that? I wouldn't come!"

"The Earl of Whitmore was very much upset, I suppose, by your answer? You had known him for a long time?"

"I'd known him for ten years. Of course he was upset."

"Doubtless he threatened to kill himself?"

"I daresay he did. How should I remember?" said the girl sullenly. "What would happen to me if I refused to come to this trial?"

Lady Carstone entered hurriedly at the moment, and Morell was invited to repeat his information. "You need not be at all alarmed about my niece refusing to be present. She shall certainly come and answer all necessary questions," said the elder lady graciously at last; and Morell departed to arrange for the house to be watched, and for Pamela and her grandmother to be stopped in the flight which Lady Carstone had obviously planned.

As the Inspector left the house the woman and girl sat down on opposite sides of the room, and eyed one another with rage and hatred in their faces.

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"You must be got out of London somehow," muttered Lady Carstone sulkily; "and it must be at once, I suppose, before half the police in London are on our track . . . Why couldn't you marry Whitmore? He was a hundred times too good for you, and I only wonder at his wanting to marry you. We'd better send for Lord Seaford to help us."

"I have a message from him with regard to the matter," said Trent reluctantly, walking away to the window, in front of which a detective in plain clothes was already walking up and down. His profession and immediate business were written in capital letters all over him, but that in no way rendered his work less effective.

"Have you told him too?" screamed Lady Carstone furiously. "God above us, man, is there any human being in London whom you haven't told all about it!"

"Isn't it better that they should know it from me rather than from the evening papers, most of which will be out in an hour or two?"

"With our names?" asked Pamela, jumping up again from her seat and looking wildly around her.

"Who can tell?" asked the young man dispiritedly. "With mine certainly; probably with yours."

"We'd better send for Lord Seaford at once," said Lady Carstone, reaching out her hand for the bell.

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"Listen, first. You had better do nothing of the sort." Trent hesitated for a moment, and the two women who were watching him held their breath.

"Lord Seaford holds an exaggerated, possibly altogether mistaken, opinion about Miss Carstone's responsibility for this tragedy. Anyhow, he is very indignant, and desired me to say that he does not wish to see Miss Carstone again for a considerable time. Sir Norman Stanier sent practically the same message."

"What do you mean by 'practically the same' message?" asked Lady Carstone, in a hard, dry voice.

"It was rather more emphatic," said Trent unwillingly, "and Sir Norman added that he was going abroad to-morrow."

There was such a long silence in the room that Trent turned round from the window and glanced at the two women. As he looked Pamela sat down again very quietly in an arm-chair with her eyes fixed on her grandmother's face. The elder woman's eyes seemed to have the same fascination for her as the eyes of an angry snake for a chicken.

"Oh, Grannie," she said, very humbly and frightenedly, with a great sob in her voice; "you thought you were going to be free from me this summer, didn't you?"

"I hoped so certainly," was the quietly bitter reply, "but apparently I'm going to be hopelessly disgraced by you instead."

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"Why should anyone think——" began the young parson quietly.

"Would you kindly ring the bell for me?" interrupted Lady Carstone, with a cold smile. "Were you preparing to defend my granddaughter to me? Don't trouble, please; I've known her rather more years than you have hours. . . . Order the victoria, please, Charles; it is to be round as soon as Benson can possibly be ready . . . I'm going to Bedford Row to see my lawyer, Mr. Allen. You must be good enough to come with me, Pamela. From there we had better go to some house agents and tell them to let this house and Wynsley for two or three years, and I will tell Simpson that we are not at home to anybody for the rest of our stay in London. It will be an unnecessary precaution, I should imagine! Good-bye, Mr. Trent. There is a vague feeling in my mind that I have to thank you for something, but I'm sure I can't think what it is. However, we thank you at a venture, Pamela and I. Charity visits, such as yours, are all we have to look for in the future, I expect. My granddaughter has a way of bringing more agreeable forms of social life to a somewhat summary and unpleasant end."

## CHAPTER XXIV

**A** LARGE stuffy room; a hot odour coming from somewhere near by of mutton, beer, and tobacco; a little group of twelve men in one place whispering excitedly; a very hot and very solemn-looking man sitting by himself glancing nervously at a struggling little crowd of men with pens and notebooks at a beer-stained deal table; somewhere in a vague distance a score or so of other persons who seemed to be a dim blur of eyes and whispers; and then a sudden frightful cessation of all sound, and the sudden turning of a hundred wide-open eyes to a little group of people entering hurriedly by a side door. A man's voice mutters: "Will your Ladyship sit here? Will you take this chair, my Lord?" There is a little buzz of talk, while two men, and after them a woman, stand up somewhere answering questions in a low, steady murmur. Then a voice calls quietly and distinctly for "The Marquis of Seaford"; Seaford stands in the place where the other three were just now standing, and the low-toned conversation proceeds, smoothly and rapidly at first, then slowly and intermittently, while the men with the pens write with breathless zeal. Questions and answers cease.

"Miss Pamela Carstone!"



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A man sitting near her gets up and escorts Pamela to the place which Seaford has just vacated; the girl raises the black veil from her anxious face for a moment and looks steadily, as the family lawyer has advised her to do, at the Coroner without moving her eyes to right or left; but she cannot help seeing a little movement at the neighbouring table, where two or three men are edging round so as to get more in front of her, and are trying to sketch her. She hears the little stream of questions for most of which the lawyer had prepared her, answers them automatically in a voice which is hardly audible even in this dead silence, and at the words, "Thank you, Miss Carstone, that is all," turns and looks blindly for the person who has brought her here. He leads her back to a seat; someone asks somebody else—herself perhaps—"Do you wish to wait for the end?" and as the girl mutters an angry "no," she is taken away out of the stifling, whispering room—somewhat to the disappointment of the Coroner, who has prepared some sympathetic eloquence for her.

There is a great crowd outside. One of the horses has been made restive by a neighbouring costermonger, the footman cannot open the carriage door for a moment, and Pamela hears her name whispered a dozen times among the changing groups of mercilessly staring faces pressing round her; a woman in the crowd calls out something, and there is a little laughter and a cry or

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two of "Shut up!" "Shame!" and Lady Carstone angrily tells the footman to go and hold the horses' heads. Presently Pamela is back at home in her sitting-room, lying barely conscious on a sofa, and nightmare pictures of eyes and whispers racing through her brain.

Will it be better to read the story in the papers or not? Could the most dreadful reality be worse than the columns of horror with which she has been filling the newspapers herself as she lies on the sofa? She had heard literally not one single word of the evidence at the inquest; from chance expressions dropped by the lawyer and police inspector she had gathered vaguely that, if the inquest ended in a certain verdict, there might have to be another kind of trial of somebody or other in which she would be obliged again to give evidence. Perhaps the papers might enlighten her on that point. After tea the suspense became intolerable, and she sent out for a batch of them, took up one, eyed it distastefully for a moment, and then turned the pages with trembling fingers. Presently a great headline with the word "Suicide" in it, caught her eyes and she put the paper down, unable to see the words, unable to try, hardly conscious of anything except that her heart was beating suffocatingly, that her face and hands were icy cold and wet with perspiration, that she wanted more brandy, and that she had told her maid to go away and not come back till dinner-time.

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The feeling passed off after a few moments, and she took up the newspaper. . . What horrible language they used! "After viewing the body . . ." Good God! Did that mean that Whitmore's body had been close by her all the time? The narrative would make her ill if she read it, Pamela told herself angrily, but somehow or other she must get through it. . . What on earth did Seafood mean by denying that Whitmore had any serious financial trouble, and yet repeating and insisting on the fact that he had been behaving very strangely during the past few days, and that he, the witness, and several other friends had been anxious about his health? What was this absurd narrative of Trent's, about "Whitmore having behaved so eccentrically on his last evening that the witness had serious doubt about his sanity, and felt that he ought not to have left him alone?" She read her own evidence with a great sigh of relief; if she had really said nothing more than that, no great mischief had been done. What did the verdict mean: "Suicide during temporary insanity"? Whitmore was no more insane than she was herself, and never had been. The whole newspaper story, witnesses, summing-up, and verdict, was simply silly. Even the description of her hat and dress was foolish.

Pamela's spirits rose slightly when she had finished the paper. If this was the worst, it was not so very terrible. No one would read such

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a trivial story except people directly interested in it. With the exception of a few close and intimate friends of Lord Whitmore's, none of their own set would be very greatly horrified. Pamela tumbled the papers on to the floor, got up off her sofa, went to the window and listened with a little sigh of regret and vexation and envy to the distant hum of London traffic which floated up to her sitting-room. What an absurd idea it was of her grandmother's, to say "not at home" to all visitors for the rest of their stay in London! Pamela wanted to know what people were saying about the events of the past three days. If it were not for the loathsome legal complications, police interference, coroner's inquests, and such like horrors, it was really rather—what could one say without being thought heartless and disagreeable?—there was no denying the fact that it was rather,—well, romantic and interesting for a girl to have a lover kill himself for love of her. Pamela was sorry of course; she did not want him to do anything of the sort; but it was an incident which could not have happened, say, to Hilda Stanier or Frances Adeane, and if Eleanor Hamilton jilted Carstone to-morrow, the latter certainly would not change a single one of his London plans on that account, and would turn up quite comfortably at Goodwood on the last Tuesday in July. It was almost gratifying to think that there was so much romance left in the world,

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especially if Miss Pamela Carstone was to be the heroine of it. Pamela turned with quite an animated face to watch the opening door. If it was Nina coming to say that a visitor wished to see her in spite of front-door prohibition, the visitor should certainly be shown upstairs.

It was Lady Carstone, however, who entered the room, and Pamela turned to face her with gloomy eyes and a movement of impatience. To say the truth, her Ladyship had not been making herself very pleasant during the past two days. She looked round the little, daintily furnished room now, and her coldly angry eyes rested on a table full of photographs:

"Don't you think you'd better make some alterations on that table?" asked my Lady drily, and Pamela flushed angrily, marking the photograph of Whitmore which still stood there.

"I will put it away this evening," she muttered sullenly. "I suppose we are not going to the Allenbys'?"

"Going to the . . . ! My good girl, if that poor little fool had married you, I wonder what on earth would have happened to your ménage socially, at the end of a season! His ideas of decency were tolerably quaint, but they were Mrs. Grundy gone mad compared to yours!"

"I said I supposed we were not going," was the sulky answer.

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"I heard the tone in which you 'supposed' it," said the elder lady grimly. "Now, regarding what I have come here for. I have just been to see Lord Seaford."

"Have you?" Pamela looked up with startled eyes.

"Yes. After his insolence to us this morning—you were too absorbed in putting your hat straight for the benefit of the jury to notice it, but he stared us full in the face and cut us this morning—I sent a note to him, asking him to come and see me, and he just wrote on the back of my note: 'The Marquis of Seaford has no desire to see Lady Carstone,' and sent it back to me. So I went to him this afternoon and saw him."

"Well?" Pamela's lips were very dry and her voice hard.

"That parson Trent gave us a very much expurgated edition of his message the other morning, it appears. He is perfectly furious; says you have killed Whitmore, and he would like more or less to return the compliment. Anyhow, he will never see you again if he can help it. Also it appears that Sir Norman was in the room with him the other morning, and sent a message to the same effect, and in fact left for Stockholm this afternoon."

"Well?" repeated the girl in the same sullen voice. But her eyes were flashing and lips trembling with rage.

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"You would call it 'well'? Yes? I shouldn't, you know."

Lady Carstone sat down and eyed her granddaughter with a curious look as if she were considering how far human patience ought to last in dealing with such a person.

"How many days will it take Lord Seaford to cool down?" asked Pamela, having no desire to be rude or flippant, but honestly meaning her question.

"How many . . . !" Lady Carstone gave a little gasp and then leant back in her seat with an air of giving up some intended business as a bad job: "Frankly, I think it will take him some time. To tell you the truth, I think he liked Whitmore, and is quite vexed about his death. But that may be only my fancy."

"And Sir Norman Stanier has already gone away?"

"Has already gone. Seaford may have been exaggerating, but I gathered from him that Sir Norman was quite annoyed too. I can't imagine why."

Pamela turned slowly round and faced her grandmother, the latter's sarcasm having at length reached her understanding.

"I'm rather tired this evening," she said, with a little sigh, and a glance at the litter of newspapers on the floor. "Won't all this do to-morrow?"

"I have a good deal of business to do, as all

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our plans are changed for the rest of the year, and I see no object in waiting till to-morrow," said the elder lady, making a last desperate attempt to control her temper.

"What is there to be said? What part of the programme do you want to change? Mayn't we go to the Frasers' for Goodwood?"

"Oh . . . !" Lady Carstone gave another little gasp, but resettled her voice into a slow monotone. "I think we had better not. My own inclination would be to go abroad now, and stay there till Christmas, or perhaps longer. My inclination to do so is, in fact, so strong that I hope you will see your way to fall in with it without further question. I would rather not have another of the wrangles into which we have drifted once or twice recently; we must check such a tendency, as you are now, I suppose, settling down with me again indefinitely."

"Am I? Why?"

Lady Carstone shrugged her shoulders.

"Why ask such questions? By the way, should you have any objection to leaving the day after to-morrow? Neither of us, I imagine, is anxious to spend longer than is necessary in a shut-up house with nobody to speak to. I was thinking of going to Homburg for three weeks and then on to Switzerland."

Pamela turned back to the window, her breath coming quickly, her hands clenched with rage, her lips tight-set to prevent one of the outbreaks.



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of fury which she had always deprecated as much as her grandmother. On this occasion such an outbreak would be peculiarly foolish. It was an open question which was viewing this stroke of fate with more bitter warmth, Pamela or her grandmother, and which would adopt the most desperate measures to counteract it if any counter-stroke had been possible. Pamela felt now the most complete and uncomfortable assurance that her guardian would not have adopted this air of finality until every possible scheme had been born, studied from every point of view, and unwillingly put to death in her far-seeing and (especially where her own comfort was concerned) active brain. In this case, said the girl desolately to herself, her own idea of comfort and her grandmother's coincided completely; so, if Lady Carstone had given up this present problem as a bad job, Pamela would save herself trouble by doing the same.

"You need hardly have reminded me at such a very early moment," she said drearily, "that my chance of being married is over for the moment. Of course I will do as you like, and we'll start for Homburg as soon as you like. There's no harm, is there, in my seeing one or two people before we go—Eleanor and Jack and the Adeanes and people of that sort?"

"They haven't shown any overwhelming desire to see us for their own part," said the other drily; "but I suppose they must be let in if they

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do come and call. Catharine says the Hamiltons are very cross."

"But you've forgotten the wedding," cried Pamela suddenly, her face lighting up with excitement and delight. "We must come back for that!"

"They talk of putting it off. They supposed that both you and I would want to keep quiet for a few months." Lady Carstone surveyed the radiant young face with cold anger. "Imagine it! And Eleanor has been an intimate friend of yours for five years, hasn't she!"

Again Pamela pressed her lips together and turned away in silence; and for a moment Lady Carstone felt a trifle ashamed of herself.

"I'll tell the servants to come and let us know at any rate if anyone comes to call, and I suppose you can see them if you like," she said more kindly. "Silence of this sort, I must confess, does get on one's nerves a bit."

My Lady had not left the room very long when Nina came in with a card.

"The gentleman wants to know if you would care to see him for a short time? Her Ladyship has sent down to say that she is not at home."

Pamela glanced at the name. "Sir Francis Anstruther," she repeated in an uninterested voice; then suddenly she took the card into her hand and looked at it with curious, quick interest. "Sir Francis Anstruther . . . Ye-es; go and say I will see him. And, Nina . . ."

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"Yes, miss?"

"When you've told Simpson, come back and put me into that black lace tea-gown, and . . . where are the keys? I want some pearl things out."

But as the maid left the room Pamela did not at once go to her jewel case. Instead, she stood quite motionless in front of a long looking-glass, apparently studying herself in minutest detail, in reality seeing nothing. The card dropped out of her hand and fell into a little circle of sunset light, and the girl watched the name on it, as she stood above it with her hands clasped and forehead contracted into a little frown of question and doubt and hesitation. Once for a moment she glanced round her room, and bent forward touching little objects near her, with the half-frightened, half-wondering look of a person who is saying good-bye to some familiar scene associated with a thousand long days of peace and joy. Crowded, wavering thoughts were sweeping across the mobile young face as she looked, and one of them ended in a smile of angry triumph, which still lingered there as Nina came back into the room to announce that the black tea-gown was ready.

## CHAPTER XXV

**T**HE Marquis of Seaford sat in the little morning-room of the house which he had taken near Havant for the Goodwood week. It was nearly one o'clock on the first day of the meeting, and his guests had already left for the race course, the Marquis saying that he would follow later. Should he go now? On the whole he thought not. He had come down here hoping that this familiar scene and ever-fresh excitement, with a few, carefully selected friends to keep him company, would help him to forget the tragedy of a fortnight before, but it had merely irritated him. He did not in the least want to go to Goodwood. For a few moments a desire came into his mind to turn his friends out of the house, and invite Lady Arlington, the Ellis children, Trent, and the Mother Superior of the Bath Convent to stay with him there; and if the racing friends had been in the house at the time, instead of on the race course, he would probably have done so.

He sat motionless in the little room for nearly two hours, muttering "no" and a curse to an occasional servant who came in to ask him if he wanted the carriage or luncheon; then towards three o'clock, as the room became insufferably

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hot under a blazing summer afternoon's sun, and brooding became intolerable, he flung a hat on his head, took up his heavy walking-stick, and went out with some vague intention of meeting his guests on their way home and telling them to go away.

Rambling on along the pretty, honeysuckle-covered lanes north of the Chichester road, passing a dozen familiar houses in which he had either played host or guest at this popular race week, Seaford came out at last on to a little village green with a cottage overlooking it, in one window of which a woman was sitting working. The Marquis leant absent-mindedly for a moment against a railing separating the cottage-garden from the road. Then he looked up and met the woman's eyes.

As he did so, his face became suddenly convulsed with rage, a cigar dropped from his hands, and he shook his stick furiously at the woman, who immediately put down her work and came to the door, saying abruptly in a self-excusing tone: "This cottage belongs to me. I have come here for a little rest, not for the races—apparently very much like yourself, Lord Seaford. Will you come in? I am quite alone."

"Woman"! thundered Seaford, almost inarticulate with passion; "what do you suppose it matters to me whether you are here or in hell, for racing or for more murder, by yourself or with a dozen new men to replace my boy?"

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"You have been kind to me," said Miss Acland simply. "Say what you please now if it relieves you. I am not the offender, but I will not answer."

"You are one as bad as the other,—you and Miss Carstone; you are a pair of impudent, shameless women who ought to be tried and hung for murder. I meant to say so at that inquest, only some damned lawyer told me it would harm the boy in some way, and that meddling young parson dragged me away."

"I think Providence is going to save you the trouble of punishing either of us. Miss Carstone at least is in safe hands, so far as retribution is concerned."

"Her old harridan of a grandmother?" asked the man after a moment's pause. "There is nothing in that. The two she-devils are quite used to one another."

"Haven't you heard of her engagement to Sir Francis Anstruther? It has been announced in all the papers. Little Bobby Freeland stopped here this morning on his way to the race course to tell me about it. Anstruther is with them in Homburg, and it appears to have been settled there."

"Have you any paper here with the news in it?"

My Lord asked the question very quietly, but his face was so horrible to look at as he leant on his stick and glared at the woman before him,

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that she turned away hastily and went into the house. It was some little time before she returned with a newspaper, but the Marquis stood motionless with his hands on his stick and his eyes staring at the door. Then he read the paragraph to which Cora pointed, and turned away without a word, and resumed his walk.

Pamela and . . . Anstruther! The foolish, pretty girl who had come to him so often during the past two or three years with her laughter and griefs and idle tears and silly butterfly joys, whom his dear lad had loved so long and so well . . . to spend the rest of her life with this racing tout, this vulgar swindler, this coarse-minded disgrace of an old and famous name! Pamela to give her fair, young body and idle, pretty life to be hurt and maimed and wrecked by this low bully to whom no man spoke if he could help it, and no decent woman spoke at all! Seaford's steps quickened, his hand clenched itself on his stick, his white lips muttered rage and execrations. What had made the girl take such a fearful step? Did she mind more than he thought, and had Whitmore's death in fact turned her brain? Had she chosen this man in a mere desperate attempt to revenge herself on her guardians and friends for their desertion? Had Lady Carstone told her frankly that she would not take charge of her for another week, and so tumbled her, shrinking and horrified, into this man's arms? At this last

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thought Seaford stood still in the middle of the road, and a little, audible cry of rage and pity and desire came from his lips. The picture of the night at Beddowes rose before his eyes, he could almost hear the young voice saying, "If it were a question of anybody I cared about, I would cut my hand off sooner than let him fall in love with me unless I could give him everything I wanted." She had meant himself. She would have come to him then. And then again, with violent revulsion of feeling, Seaford saw the face of the hapless boy friend who had killed himself because this girl had fooled him till she had got everything she wanted out of him, and then flung him aside; and watching this new picture, he loathed and despised Pamela with an indescribably passionate hatred. He wanted to marry her and then kill her, to save her from the fate which she had mapped out for herself, and then punish her horribly; above all things to prevent any other man taking her, whether it might be for her own satisfaction or destruction, to-day or for eternity.

Cora Acland watched the Marquis move away, and read his mind with perfect ease. She was sorry for him, but quite unable to understand Pamela's attraction in the minds of men of his kind.

"The girl is so fearfully stupid!" she said to herself in wonder, "and that man isn't stupid. I could even understand poor Whitmore . . .



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Here are these children again. Good God! That boy will be killed!"

Reggie and Marjorie Ellis appeared suddenly from between the hedges of a lane. They were staying in some lodgings at Emsworth, while their parents "did" Goodwood from a neighbouring house. Once or twice during the past three days Cora had met them in the neighbouring lanes, looking sadly bored and unhappy, and had nodded to them and even once ventured a remark about the mushrooms in an adjacent field. But though she had seen afterwards from a distance that her suggestion about a mushroom hunt had been adopted, though the boy's bright face always had a smile and a nod for her, the little lady was resolute in declining her acquaintance. What could she know? thought Cora angrily; and watched with an eagerness which struck her at times as remarkably silly for some sign of relenting in the proud, small face, and for some chance of making friends. It was so like Nancy's face! The short, tilted nose and curled-up lip had just her ridiculous expression of quiet disdain for all things extant; the short curls were all sunny and gold and tumbled, just like that other person's; the baby voice, whenever it let itself be heard, had just the half-tired, half-scornful tone in it, which used to make people listen with vague pain and wonder when Nancy spoke.

The chance had come now,—come suddenly

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and terribly. Cora Acland's eyes passed in a flash from the corner of the lane round which the children were turning, to a small wagonette and pair of horses which was being driven at scandalous speed along the side of the green from which the lane opened, and whose coming was hidden by high hedges. The carriage and children were going to reach the corner together. Cora ran out from her cottage gate with a warning cry to the carriage, which had no other effect but to make the coachman turn and look at her in wonder. The boy ran round the corner at the moment, and disappeared with a scream in a whirl of dust and revolving wheels and horses' feet, the carriage pulling up finally amid Marjorie's shrieks and the terrified exclamations of its occupants.

Miss Acland ran forward to the senseless child-figure which lay in the road, and over which Marjorie was already bending in wild terror. In a hasty examination, she could find nothing more serious than the mark of a wheel passing over the boy's arm, which might be broken, and a light blow from a horse's hoof on his cheek. A man, who had jumped out of the carriage, came forward to help and Cora turned on him furiously: "Leave the boy alone. I'm going to carry him to my house. Go on to Emsworth and bring back a doctor. Go quickly; straight down that road! you can't miss the way unless your coachman is mad or drunk or both."

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"It wasn't altogether his fault," said the man humbly. "Of course we will get a doctor."

Marjorie gave an odd little look of gratitude at the woman as she spoke, partly as if she would say "thank you" for her promise of help, partly as if she were grateful for her violent language to the owner of the carriage; then as Cora picked up the boy very carefully and carried him indoors, Marjorie came by her side, a child's facile tears beginning to flow now. They created a quivering rage of pity in Cora's mind; it was only with an effort that she refrained from putting the boy down on the first sofa she came to, and kneeling by Marjorie to console her. She saw that the child was watching her with little glances of admiring wonder as she cut Reggie's coat and shirt off with some large scissors and examined the wounded shoulder. The boy's arm was badly broken, but otherwise only a few bruises had resulted. Marjorie was allowed to help in doctoring these, and when the boy became conscious again and the Emsworth doctor had paid his visit, all three were on the best of terms.

Later in the evening Reggie's father came over, having been informed in a brief note of what had taken place; and, seeing nothing but a ladylike person in a comfortable house perfectly willing to keep a young patient, who certainly could not be moved for a week, whether the lady in question was willing or unwilling,

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he expressed due gratitude, offered to get a nurse from Portsmouth, proposed to take Marjorie away with him, gave up both ideas when the children and their hostess equally opposed them, and departed well satisfied. Cora watched him going away with a little quiver of nervous thankfulness. She had the children to herself for a whole night, even Marjorie's maid having been sent back to Emsworth on some plea of lack of room. To-morrow a score of voices would be anxious to inform Mr. Ellis who she was; and one, perhaps even both, of the children would be removed. To-night she had them to herself.

How ridiculously like Nancy this child was! How ludicrously and achingly every gesture and word and look recalled that other person's ways! Her very clothes were like a frock which she had bought for Nancy once for seaside purposes, a little blue and white check garment which Nancy had called "the duster"! Cora put two trembling arms round the child, and knelt down beside her and kissed her shoulders and hands and hair and cheeks with shaking lips.

"How angry you were with me," the woman whispered with a trembling laugh, "when first I saw you! And I couldn't make out why."

"Someone told me afterwards . . . but I don't like to tell you. You have been so kind to Reggie and me."

"Yes, yes; tell me."

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"Someone said you were . . . wicked, and that I was quite right not to talk to you."

"Did they?" Cora's hands went on unfastening the child's frock for a moment in silence; then her voice began again very quietly and soberly as though she knew well enough how easily ten-year-old folk are scared by hints of tragedy and pain. "Would you like a hot bath in my room? It's been so hot and dusty all day, hasn't it? . . . And yet, do you know, though perhaps I am rather wicked, I had a little girl once who loved me and liked talking to me."

"And was she wicked, too?" asked Marjorie, groping for explanations after the manner of her kind.

"No, oh, no," said Cora, with a little gasp. "I will show her to you . . . You would like to have the bath, would you? Yes? Come into my room. I have her picture in this locket. Do you know, I think she is rather like you."

Marjorie took the locket with the deep interest which would naturally be caused by such an assertion, and studied it carefully. "She looks as if she had been crying," the child said with a little tone of awe. "Why did she cry? There are tears in her eyes."

"I don't know. I didn't see her for a very long time. And now she is gone where all tears are dried. She doesn't look wicked, does she?"

"Oh, no, no." The agony of repressed pain in

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the voice speaking to her filled Marjorie's eyes with tears again, and she clung tight to the woman, holding her cheek against Cora's.

"And will you kiss me now . . . why, you are kissing me without being asked!" Miss Acland knelt there, trembling under the touch of the baby-lips with such a passion of adoring love as had not filled her soul for long years past. "Do you know, I used to undress that other little girl every night and bathe her just like this. She had brown stockings just like yours, and lace and little pink ribbons on her chemise and drawers just like yours! And she used to love splashing in her bath. Do you like that too?"

"Oh, yes; but if she was like that, why did she cry?"

"'Why did she cry?'" The woman lifted the naked, little figure into its bath, and held her hands on it for a moment, and kissed its shoulders again as if her fingers and lips could not bear to leave the soft, white flesh. "I wonder why? They should have got her more toys and sweets! Yet she had rooms full, they said; and yet she wanted me . . . and cried!"

"Sometimes," said the child rather wonderingly, "there seem to be whole days together when everyone is rather sad. It is like that just now. I don't know why. Yesterday we met Lord Seaford, and he was very sad too. And Dad told us that Miss Carstone, who is a great

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friend of Reggie's, had gone abroad instead of coming here, because she is unhappy and wants to get away from everybody . . . Haven't you finished soaping that leg?" hinted Miss Ellis politely. "Don't you want the other?"

"Yes, perhaps I do. Was I rubbing you too much? . . . I don't think Miss Carstone can be very unhappy. She's engaged to be married, you know, and the man she's engaged to is abroad with her. It's Sir Francis Anstruther. Perhaps you know him?"

"Oh . . . " A look of unutterable disgust spread itself over the disdainful little face. "I have seen him. Pamela won't marry him."

"I should say, if you asked me suddenly, that your toe-nails want cutting. Would you like me to cut them for you?"

"Yes, please, if you don't mind. I like having my nails cut; they feel all soft and funny afterwards. . . . Pamela is in love with Lord Seaford, you know. That's why I am sure she won't marry Sir Francis Anstruther. You see, it would be rather vexing to marry one man if you're in love with another one, and Pamela hates being vexed."

"But she has promised to marry him, you know . . . Would you like to come out and be dried now? Come and sit on my knee in this big towel."

"Oh, how nice and warm! . . . My aunt,

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Lady Arlington, says that some people like being engaged. It doesn't mean anything, only it's just interesting. I expect Pamela is like that. But it would be different with Lord Seaford, because he loves her very, very much, and he wants her. I love him too, and so does Reggie, though we can't help being a little afraid of him. I'll tell you something about them, only perhaps it's a secret."

"Is it? Oh, well, I must not know then, must I? You don't a bit mind my kissing you now, do you?" The woman had sat down on a sofa with Marjorie on her knee; the big bath towel had fallen away, and as the little bare, white body lay there, warm and damp from its bath, she took it in her arms and held it close to her, while something in the passionate touch of these hands on her sensitive flesh seemed to tell a story to Marjorie, who with the instinctive movements and memories of the babyhood from which she was not so long parted, put her arms round the woman's neck, and laughed when they were kissed again and again, and held up her lips with love-lit eyes, to be kissed yet again. Merciful Heaven! God of mercy and pardon and pity! Was this Nancy herself come back for a few hours to heal the weary aching of those past years.

"It's my secret, so I can tell it to you if I like," said the small voice, rather proudly. "I think I will tell you; then perhaps you could help



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them. I really do know that Lord Seaford and Pamela are in love with one another, because once at Beddowes they talked and held one another's hands and whispered, and—oh, you know; just like lovers. And one night I sat on the railings near the trees, where everyone at Beddowes goes when they want to make love, and kept watch for them."

"But Marjorie, darling, how can you be sure? You didn't hear them say anything, did you?"

"Oh, but I am perfectly certain, and sure and positive. One always knows, doesn't one?"

Cora laughed softly, with a little sob in her throat. That other person always used to profess precise and universal knowledge in such matters, and was the terror of Newmarket on account of the fearful accuracy of her guesses. How lovely it was to receive such whispered confidences again from a person of this sex and age, and to consider that they were probably more than half true! Boys were interesting people in their way, Cora supposed, but how dull their confidences and secrets were compared to the whispers of a creature like this! She stole another glance at the small body, stroking it down on pretence of feeling if it was dry; then held it closer to her, and asked gravely:

"But what would you have me do, my baby?"

"I don't know." The child shook her head and her voice sounded unhappy again, so that the most desperate schemes began to float

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through Cora's mind. She would go to Hom-burg and fetch Pamela home by force. She would force Seaford to tell her what was the matter, and then tell him any and every lie which came into her head in order to put matters straight.

The latter plan was not altogether impossible, thought Miss Acland to herself, when Marjorie's toe-nails had been cut and her nightgown put on and her eyes kissed to sleep. Anyhow, the child had asked her to accomplish this reconciliation, and of course it was going to be done somehow, and this seemed the simplest way to begin. The Marquis would probably be here to-morrow. He would hear of the accident, hear that the two children had been left at her house, tell Mr. Ellis who she was, and, while the latter fetched Marjorie away, might be induced by a judicious note to come and spend a few minutes with Reggie. As she lay on a sofa in Reggie's room, Cora wrote the note asking Lord Seaford to come, and sent it to him by a messenger early in the morning. My Lord appeared shortly afterwards, riding his great bay horse, and summoned her out to him, standing by her railings with his horse's reins in one hand and his whip in the other. In the morning light his face was the face of an old man who had lived twice the allotted span of life, with twice the allotted number of tempests and griefs and tragedies in each span. He stared at Miss Acland gloomily while

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she told the story of Reggie's accident, laughed a sardonic laugh when she supposed that Marjorie would not be allowed to stay with her till Reggie was well, and then asked roughly what all this had to do with him. How could he move the brat, or help them if the doctor said that the boy must lie still? Why had she sent for him, saying that some words of Marjorie's had suggested that he was wanted here?

"The words were not about Reggie," said Miss Acland hesitatingly.

"Hell, woman!" said Seaford roughly. "Am I wanted to mend her stockings, or to make the boy's bed? I like the two little devils, and if they want me for anything, I will hear. But I'm not here to talk to you."

"I think Marjorie wishes me to say something to you about yourself and . . . Pamela Carstone."

The Marquis reeled back against the railing as if he had been struck a great blow, and stood there, stammering incoherently with passion.

"How dare you say that name to me?" he asked in a savage whisper. "Mention her again and, by the Lord, you shall feel this horsewhip about you. I'm not so particular but that I've let a woman have the whip in my time."

"I have something to say about her," said Miss Acland very quietly; "something in her defence."

"If you like to take your chance of this whip,"

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muttered the Marquis hoarsely, "go on; say what you please."

Miss Acland studied the man with frightened interest. So it was true what Marjorie had told her last night, that he was in love with Pamela? Then she just had to do what the little child had told her, and, "make it up" between them.

"You are very seriously misjudging your friend, Miss Carstone," she said quietly. "Do you know who made her say 'no' to Lord Whitmore at last? I did. I did not choose Lord Whitmore to marry her. In spite of all the attempts which you made to bribe me into silence, I was not silent. I told my whole story to Lady Carstone, meaning her to tell it to Miss Carstone, knowing that she would tell it to Miss Carstone. And she did tell it."

"It's the sort of thing a woman like you would do, I suppose, damn you," said the man savagely, "to take a bribe and then betray the person who had bribed you!"

"Possibly," Cora answered, with the quiet patience of a woman who has a point to make and is content to bear all things and give up all things in order to make it. "I did not mean Whitmore to marry this girl for two reasons: partly I wished to keep his protection and his money for myself, partly I knew she was not in love with him, and I, who was foolish enough to like him still, did not want him to be miserable."

There was a very long pause, Cora awaited

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the next question with placid knowledge of what was coming, and a little glance at the window where Marjorie and Reggie were occupied with a paint box.

"Do you presume to tell me," asked Seaford scornfully, "that you knew she was in love with this wretched racing tout to whom she has just engaged herself?"

Miss Acland raised her eyes quietly, met those of the Marquis, held them for a moment, and then looked away into the blue distance of the Sussex Downs.

"No, I didn't mean that," she said quietly.

"She has a dozen lovers, you think, and cares for none of them?"

"Oh, no, I don't think that either."

All the rage and hatred which had been written on Seaford's face left it slowly; his lips quivered, his breath came quickly, his eyes were raised suddenly to Cora's face in passionately eager question. Then suddenly he drew himself up again with an angry, violent movement:

"But she had killed my boy," he said.

"It is a very hard thing to say of any man," said Cora quietly, and watching the effect of her words with nervous scare, "but I think what has happened to your boy is for the best. He was hopelessly ruined—ruined for ever and ever; pocket, body, soul and mind were all ruined past hope of redemption. He had lost nearly all his money, and was losing the rest as fast as he

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could, and would never have had any more. He was weak in mind and body, and was getting weaker. He had frankly abandoned all ambition, care for himself, hope of honour, fame and redemption in this world or the next. Only one thing could have saved him, and that was this marriage with Pamela Carstone—who would not have married him, and for months past had never meant to marry him.”

“You are a fool. She would.”

“Never, never, never! And who should blame her? Not I, for sure. She knew, if she thought about the matter at all, that it was far beyond her power to reform him. And she was in love with somebody else—not this Anstruther person.”

“Then why in the devil’s name is she marrying him?”

“God help her, how should I know? It’s a way men and women have, to take what they can get when they can’t get what they want.”

“But what does she want?” the Marquis asked in a husky whisper.

“How should I be able to tell you, Lord Seaford? Surely you know her better than I do. Listen, there’s Reggie calling for me. I must go to him . . . By the way, Bobby Freeland told me that Lady Carstone had gone to Hom-burg only for a three weeks’ cure, and was going on to Chamouni afterwards.”

“What do you mean by saying that?”

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"What do I mean by saying this? What do I mean by doing that! Oh, Lord Seaford," said Cora, moving inside the house with a light laugh, "what a relief it is to talk sometimes to a person like your little friend Marjorie, who knows all things by just looking at you!"

## CHAPTER XXVI

**T**WILIGHT was falling over the Chamouni valley. The round far-off summit of Mont Blanc shone with soft rose colour for a few moments and turned grey and cold like the Dôm light by its side. The Arve and Arveiron, having flung themselves into one another above the village, went tumbling and raving down the valley, lost here in a silent sea of pines, reappearing there to roar through rocky clefts and to tumble cataracts of logs and stones down to St. Gervais. High up on the slopes below Montanvert and the Brevent, and in the darkening pine forests stretching up to Pierre Pointue, all the familiar sounds of an Alpine valley were mingling in the evening music which those who have heard it through two or three summers love above all earthly sounds, and can hear ten thousand miles away when summer evenings glow and darken in other lands; the voices of the little herd boys calling to one another across the grass slopes as they drive their goats homewards, the tumbling of distant water, the pealing notes, soft and deep and low, of the cattle bells as the cattle come down from the high pastures to their sheds. 'Tis a cure, as many a man and woman have found before now, for half the ills of life



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and all the worrying over them—that life under the great glaciers and snow fields of happy Switzerland and its neighbouring, mountain villages; or better still, on the glaciers and snow fields themselves. How on earth can you think of your debts, when a guide is explaining to you that there is only one tiny place where your foot can possibly be put for the next step? The fact of your having lately held a lover's hand in your own, matters not one little bit so long as the guide now holds yours in his firm grasp, and the most love-sick girl, if asked whether she preferred her lover's arm round her waist at The Junction or a good thick rope, would vote unhesitatingly for the rope. There came once to Chamouni a beloved friend of mine, with everything on his nerves which an excitable and very good and perfectly charming Roman Catholic priest could have there—board schools, aggressive Protestants, parish debts, sinking funds (of a kind unrecognised by Chancellors of the Exchequer) a death or two, and dyspepsia. Him, having previously provided with an ice axe, I took for a walk or two, and in five days at a certain, complicated turn on the Mer de Glace he swore three, successive times, and thereafter, if an insolent County Council had erected one of their schools in front of his bedroom window, he would merely have sent for our friend Joseph Charlet and climbed it. You forget all things on those muddy-blue walls of ice, those white,

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white fields of eternal snow. On their long, wide, still slopes, as you move steadily upwards, you are in a world where all the pleasures are real and new, and all old pains have fled away. There is a line of eternal snow on mountain heights, below which the chilly, winter snow-drifts melt and tumble down into the noisy torrents which carry them away to oblivion; away to mingle with ten thousand more crying torrents in the broad, deep Rhone waters. It is at this line that mankind can leave his tempests and pain and winter tears behind, and climb upwards into the peace which surely belongs to a world so near to heaven. It is here that the intoxication of those wondrous mountain winds—wine and meat and sleep and new life to dust-choked mortality—seizes him, and he moves on with new, mighty strength, and new, exquisite joy, and new certainty that heaven and immortality are only for the moment behind a veil. . . . Behind a veil? At night, outside the Matterhorn hut, heaven is more real to him than those lights of Zermatt which lie below like a bunch of fallen stars; in some morning hour on Monte Rosa, immortality cries out to him from the snow-crowned peaks and passes of Savoy and the Oberland with such insistence as a child friend's deathbed could scarce surpass!

There is but one drawback to this cure, that, when you have tried it, no other cure is of any use. If your maladies come back, and you can

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no longer take them up and bury them in the snow of the Bosses du Dromedaire, or under the Grands Mulets rocks, you can leave them nowhere. As a man who has once tasted hope, relief, pure and perfect joy, and now can but see their shadows flitting past, so you must now look up at Aiguilles and glacier heights, and watch with bitter eyes ghosts from the past standing on their summits. If it pleases you, and there is no one looking, you may fling yourself down by the side of the Schwartzsee path and cry to the mountain spirits (which you have doubtless met in the chapel by the little Black Lake) to come and take you away, if it is but for just once more, to the snowy ridge of the Matterhorn shoulder or the blue ice-slabs below the Dufour-Spitz of Monte Rosa. But I do not think they will come to fetch you—I do not think they will come, unless it is to whisper pity for the tears which they cannot dry, for the pain and earth-weariness from which they cannot lift you away.

Pamela had no small amount of affection for these Alpine villages, and she was very grateful now for such forgetfulness as they could give her. The moment of folly in London, when she had encouraged Sir Francis Anstruther to propose to her, and had accepted him in order to display her wealth of lovers, and to free Lady Carstone from her presence, had brought terrible penalties. Anstruther had altogether de-

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clined to take the matter as a passing joke. He had announced their engagement everywhere, pressed for an early wedding-day, displayed the most unexpected resolution and even violence when Pamela had hinted at the possibility of changing her mind. Moreover, Lady Carstone did not appear to be duly grateful for this chance of getting rid of her granddaughter, nor duly impressed by the number of lovers whom the girl had in reserve. She was full of querulous doubts, it appeared, as to what people would say about Pamela and about herself. The girl grew more frightened every day. Each announcement of the engagement alarmed and angered her, and latterly the idea had forced itself into her mind, filling her with blank terror as it lodged there, that against her will, in spite of an antipathy to him which was rapidly developing from vague dislike into passionate hatred, Sir Francis would marry her. She would get no help, she supposed, from Lady Carstone in getting rid of the man; her brother presumed, with the fatuous imbecility of his sex, that a girl who was engaged to a man meant to marry him. There was no one to save her, and Anstruther paid not the slightest attention to anything she said on the subject. He seemed to be an adept in the art of compromising and involving in his nets any girl who had been fool enough to grant him an inch of liberty. Pamela felt helplessly and furiously certain that he was going to marry her, and that

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at no very distant date, in spite of any protests she might make.

The idea was weighing frightfully on her mind as she strolled across some fields near the Hotel Couttet, and into the pine woods beyond. What had made her pledge herself to such a life of horror? The touch of this man with whom she had promised to spend long years to come, to share all his ambitions and schemes, to be friends with his friends, to bear his children, was horrible to her; his conversation either bored or disgusted her; when he kissed her she felt physically sick. And how utterly petty and obviously ephemeral all those troubles seemed, to escape which she had plunged into this desperate chasm! What lasts, what matters, what does not pass away, by the side of these solemn, eternal mountains, on the banks of these endlessly flowing mountain torrents? What long generations of men and women had wandered through this valley, while the sunrise and sunset light rose and glowed and sank over it, and the glacier streams raved by, and the solemn white mountains watched life and love and death and men's labour and women's tears! What thousands of people had walked up the same path, saying to themselves with their lips how little it all mattered, and how soon earth's kindly scented soil should lie above them, blotting out alike sunlight and hope and memory and fear.

Ah, but those few years were so few and so

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short, and God only knew if there were really any others beyond, and they mattered so frightfully while one was passing through them! What would you have? When you are twenty-three, sixty years are longer and much more real than eternity; and a man by your side throughout them, influencing every day, poisoning every hour, matters frightfully! Pamela leant against a young pine tree on the edge of a small, open space and looked up to the darkening evening sky where a few stars and the pale August moon were already showing themselves, and cried to herself that Providence dared not put this dreadful burden on her. But as she spoke the words half aloud, a cold chill was at her heart and she knew they were not true. She had met her match in the vulgar bully, who had spent a fortnight with them at Homburg, and was coming here to-morrow. Sir Francis Anstruther meant to marry her, and neither God nor man would help her.

To-morrow! Was he coming to-morrow? Footsteps sounded along the pathway by which she had come, a loud, jolly voice called her name, and an arm was put round her: "Nothing but luck, sweetheart! I came away from Paris twelve hours sooner than I hoped, caught a train at Geneva which ought not to have been there, according to the timetable, and found a woman at the hotel who not only said she knew where you had gone but, contrary to all precedent and

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experience, really did know. Haven't you got a kiss for me, and a word or two to say that you aren't particularly sorry to see me?"

Pamela held a cold cheek up to be kissed, and said something about its all being very lucky; and stood there, very still. In this lonely pine-forest, help and hope seemed a million miles away; the shadow of the inevitable fell from every tree and wrapped her in a shroud colder than the snow which lay above. In yonder village there was no man or woman who cared a farthing for her, or would lift a finger to help her; for a hundred miles round she might cry for help and none would come; to-night she might write a score of appeals to the homeland where once Pamela thought that every other person she spoke to was a devoted friend and admirer, ready to go through fire and water or the marriage service itself at her slightest bidding, and there was no one to save her.

She went through the inevitable love scene, now, with an amount of self-control which argued favourably for the success of her married life afterwards. One dreadful, little shudder shook her when the man, with a leering glance into her eyes, said something about the early days of the honeymoon; but mercifully they seemed to be associated in his mind with the Houghton Meeting at Newmarket, near which date she had, it appeared, promised to marry him. The conversation drifted away to his

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horses in the Cambridgeshire, and so on to a horse of his which was running next month in the St. Leger. And they were moving homewards as they talked, out of the forest twilight, towards lamps and hotels and humanity.

"I tell you my own private opinion is that Esterel has a most uncommon good chance of winning the St. Leger. It was all Garfield could do to stay that mile and a half at Epsom, the easiest mile and a half in England; and you saw him, yourself, beaten to glory at Ascot. He'll collapse like an empty potato sack in that last quarter of a mile at Doncaster, and then we've nothing but Elderflower to fear. Would you like . . . I say, darling, what's the matter? Have you sprained your ankle? Are you seeing a ghost? Do you think this man coming along is going to fall upon us and steal our watches? It's only—— Why, hang me, if it isn't Seaford!"

"Yes, it's Lord Seaford."

Pamela gave a little cry and ran forward with hands stretched out, and such love and relief and welcome shining from her eyes as you may see on a little child's face when a friendly figure comes to it through a room full of terrifying strangers. For a second an answering flash of relief passed across Seaford's face, and his hands half went out to meet the others. He read the whole story in a glance. How absurd to suppose that this unhappy girl was willingly en-



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gaged to be married to the knave by her side! She was fooling him perhaps, as she had fooled men before,—my Lord's hands dropped again to his side at the thought and his face grew haggard with dark memories,—and would fool plenty more in the future. Or perhaps it was Lady Carstone's doing; she was capable of anything, thought the Marquis savagely. But in all cases, the girl must be saved from such a fate as awaited her with Anstruther. Very likely she deserved punishment, but this was outrage. The face of the poor boy, who had died writing her name, had haunted him throughout his journey here, begging him, commanding him, to snatch Pamela away from such a fate. Well, he would do that, and then travel on through a world almost as wide to his indifferent eyes as that to which Whitmore had just gone, till oblivion came to him too.

For, in these dreadful weeks, Seaford had realised the fact that he himself was in love with the girl, passionately, wildly, as men love at such an age when it is for the first time, and youth, at the fairest and brightest moment of its morning, is offered to them. He would not marry her; for ever and ever now, a dead friend was between him and that happiness. He would save her, and then go.

But apparently no memory of his anger was in Pamela's mind; she put her hands on his arm and lifted her face to his as if she would have

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had the man bend down and kiss her forehead in the paternal, protecting fashion which she remembered best of all. The dreadful horror of these weeks of reflection, followed by the crowning misery of Anstruther's sudden arrival, had blotted out much of the past from her memory; in this dreary present, where the dark pine shadows and cold, far off snow fields seemed to wrap them round in gloom, both man and girl turned back to the summer days in England and forgot everything except the fact that they were days of summer. Pamela stood by her new friend for a moment, in miserable entreating silence, looking up at him with a prayer for salvation in every touch and glance. If this was a chance meeting, and this beloved friend was going to speak coldly and pass on, she would turn back to Anstruther, confessing openly that her life was over in this world, and that only a hell of retribution was waiting for her in the future.

"Why are you here?" she asked breathlessly, with a quick sob. "Have you come to see me?"

"I . . . knew you were here." Seaford stood in the path, fighting for self-control. To see these two together, in confirmation of Miss Acland's stories, drove him mad with rage and pity. But he had not forgiven. He was not going to forgive, much less remain in love with the Pamela Carstone of last July. For the sake of his own happiness, he would fight down and banish any feeling for her. Slowly but very

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resolutely Seaford drew his arm away from her hands, and looked from the girl to Anstruther and back again in cold anger. Perhaps, after all, she was perfectly happy in this new engagement. The memory came back to him suddenly of the afternoon at Ascot when she had chosen this man's society, spent long hours with him, let him win money for her, and let everybody think that she cared for him. Perhaps she had cared then? Perhaps she was in love with him now, and was bored and annoyed by this former friend's arrival and interruption? Truly this was an ideal place for a tender love scene, this soft, summer evening, with only the murmur of mountain streams to break the silence, and twilight falling dark among the tall scented pines, and the rocks gleaming ebony and silver under a rising moon.

"I am only just out for a stroll before dinner," said the Marquis, shaking himself free from Pamela's hands. "How are you, Anstruther? See you again some time to-morrow, I suppose."

And with only one, backward glance, during which Seaford saw Anstruther go up to the girl and bend over her and put an arm round her, the Marquis strode furiously away.

## CHAPTER XXVII

**I** HAVE something to tell you," said Lady Carstone coldly, when her granddaughter came in that evening, "which will probably cause you some little shock. Lord Seaford has arrived here."

"I have seen him," the girl answered in a low voice. "He met us as we were coming home to dinner."

"While Sir Francis was with you?"

"Yes."

The elder woman shrugged her shoulders, bit her lips, looked nervously round the hall of the hotel.

"Do you suppose he knows of the engagement?"

"Yes. He hardly spoke to us."

"He didn't know that you and I were here, I suppose?"

"He said he knew," said Pamela.

"Has he developed a sudden friendship for Sir Francis, and hurried here to advise him to break off the engagement?"

"I don't know . . . Oh, Granny, shall you never speak to me again without sneers of that kind? I am so tired! I am so dreadfully tired."

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Lady Carstone turned away with a look of sudden anger on her face.

"We must end this business soon, my good girl," she said in a strained voice. "I tell you frankly my nerves aren't good for much more of it. We shall fall upon one another and tear one another's eyes out, one of these days, if we stay together much longer. The Hamiltons must take you for a month. You must go and stay with the Mashams, or somebody. I tell you openly, I can't stand you and this horrible man any longer. When are you going to marry him?"

"At once, if you like."

"Will you do that? What do you mean by 'at once'? Do answer honestly, if you can, and stick to what you say."

The girl leant against a wall, her face white and drawn and ghastly under the glaring gas-lamp. She made a little sound as if she were lying under a hill and were trying to move the burden. Then answered in a husky whisper: "I mean what I say. We will go back to England to-morrow, next day, if you like, and if the wedding is quite quiet, I suppose it might be in a few days. I—I—have been so much trouble to everybody that I will do anything you like now to save you any more worry."

"You might begin," said Lady Carstone scornfully, "by refraining from these twopenny heroics whenever I speak to you." She moved

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towards the stairs, glancing back angrily for one more moment at the pale, young face which was looking up at her. "Is Sir Francis dining here?"

"Yes, if you don't mind."

"And Lord Seaford too?" asked the other, with a jeering laugh. "Or are we to go out and meet him in the garden afterwards. And are you expecting Sir Norman here to-night? And . . . I forget whether you believe in ghosts?"

"In ghosts?" Pamela looked like one herself, as some vague comprehension of her grandmother's meaning came to her mind.

"I was calculating the chances of the whole Beddowes party reassembling here this evening," Lady Carstone answered. She laughed unpleasantly again as she spoke, and her hand was shaking as it lay on the banisters. The woman's power of self-control was at an end. Day by day now, she was growing more indifferent as regards what she said, and what Pamela said in reply, and what people thought of either of them. There was a dangerous atmosphere of freedom, of being hidden and able to do as one pleased, in this foreign mountain valley, which filled her with fierce pleasure sometimes not un-mixed with fear. There was a passion of hatred in her soul against her granddaughter, and she was free to indulge it here if she pleased, and almost afraid to find herself free, as a man might feel afraid who found himself alone at

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last with some person whom he wished to murder. My lady stood on the lower steps of the staircase now, her eyes half shut, her lips white, reflecting one second that she might "let herself go" to-night if she would, regretting the next that she was not among half a hundred acquaintances and still tied by a score of conventions which should make an outbreak impossible. Well . . . it could not begin now at any rate, and she must be civil to Anstruther at dinner. With another little laugh, as she saw from her victim's face how the last shot had told, she moved on upstairs.

A few moments of compunction came to Lady Carstone at dinner, as she watched her two companions. Neither woman nor girl had ever encountered a man like this before, in such fashion. Anstruther would have been a match for both of them now if they had both been resolutely opposed to him. Pamela alone was like a rabbit before a cobra; she had allowed him to come within striking distance, and he had struck, and she could only writhe helplessly. In his resolute, cheerful voice Anstruther explained to Lady Carstone various reasons for an immediate wedding, and when some word of protest came at last from the terrified girl, he turned to her with bullying looks and contemptuous self-assertion and coarsely hinted questions. Lady Carstone interfered for a moment, so that Pamela glanced across at her with a

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passion of gratitude in her eyes; but a moment later Anstruther was asking her about her own plans for the winter, and the merciless look came back to her face. Would they agree to mid-September, say to Wednesday, the 14th, Sir Francis asked at last, and Pamela leant forward, her white face resting on her hand, her heart beating so suffocatingly that she could not speak.

"I think that date sounds quite possible," my Lady answered, with cruel eyes fixed on the shrinking girl before her. "We can buy everything that is necessary in Paris on our way home, and very few invitations need be sent out. You both quite understand, don't you, that I cannot have a large wedding party, even at the church?"

"Then I will send a message to Jasper tonight. I have left it with him that, when he hears the date from me, he is to send the announcement to all the newspapers. That's settled then! We'll send for a bottle of fizz now and drink good luck to ourselves! Who wants large wedding parties? Two people are quite enough."

Fresh details of the arrangements were discussed every moment throughout the rest of the dinner; Lady Carstone asking cold questions and giving her assent here and there in chilly tones; Anstruther making boisterous plans for the autumn, and Pamela mechanically nodding



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assent. Once the man leant forward and put his hand on her wrist, asking some question about a visit to Newmarket in October, and bending near to her till his reddened face was close to hers, and his knees was touching hers under the table. The girl did not shrink, did not move her arm, said no word; only looked at him with such frozen fear in her eyes that their story penetrated even to his dull senses. Why Pamela had agreed to marry him, Anstruther never had understood; certainly she did not care a farthing for him; she hardly, he supposed, wanted his cheap new title or moderate income; and if the girl wished to get away from her grandmother, there must be dozens of other ways of doing it than this. However, her motives were nothing to him; she had agreed to marry him, she must be held to her agreement; and from the look in her eyes now he judged that this might not be so easy as it seemed at first. The man leant yet farther forward, his hand tightened his grip on her arm, a coldly threatening look settled down on his face:

"We know the programme now thoroughly, don't we?" he asked. "You're very quiet this evening, but I suppose Lady Carstone and I may take it that silence gives consent, eh?"

"Good Heavens, yes!" said Lady Carstone in sudden anger. "I suppose, if Pamela disapproved of any detail, she has a voice to say so, hasn't she? She doesn't suppose, does she, that

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you and I have been discussing a wedding for ourselves? ”

“Delighted, I am sure,” said Anstruther, with a rough laugh; “if Pamela has any intention of changing her mind. But I don’t think she has, has she? ”

The grip on the girl’s arm tightened again a little bit; she looked into the coarse, bullying eyes in one more moment of fascinated terror; then slightly shook her head. Anstruther took his hand away and turned triumphantly to Lady Carstone, who rose from the table with a little shiver, and a shrug of the shoulders, and some words whose shuddering gratitude was almost audible:

“Well, it isn’t me,” she muttered.

“I have been walking all afternoon, and I’m very sleepy and stupid,” Pamela said quietly as they stood in the garden a moment later. “I’m going to bed.”

“In a place like this everyone goes to bed at seven and gets up at three, don’t they?” Anstruther asked. “However, there’s a Casino here, I’m told, where, if you stick to it long enough and gamble recklessly enough, you can lose half a sovereign. I’ll go and do it. Come along and show me what’s in that cage in the garden first.”

For a moment Pamela turned towards the veranda, as if she must escape at all costs. The man wanted, she knew, to take her away there

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and kiss her good-night with a score of coarse embraces and rude touches; then the mercifully blank feeling which was almost unconsciousness, and which had enabled her to live through dinner, came back to her. What was the use of resisting? All things pass; all things come to an end; the night comes, at long last, the deepest night of all brings life's aches and pains to a close in its quiet comfortable darkness, which tells no tales, and cares for nothing, and shuts tortured, human eyes in a long, long sleep. On that other morning beyond the veil, what is the waking? Who knows? Who cares? At least it is to none of the old day's work. We take nothing out of the world, thank God; none of its weariness, sickness, torture, remorse, and hell of unsatisfied desire.

As the engaged pair stood by the chamois's cage, Pamela, with clenched hands and quivering lips, wondering each moment whether she could endure the next, two men came by who recognised Anstruther, and stopped to speak to him and were introduced to her. A few moments later they carried Anstruther off to the Casino, and she was alone.

Pamela walked on hurriedly into the pine-scented darkness. Soothing, merciful silence had fallen over the valley. One could fancy the sleeping peasants, with their children and goats and cows asleep round them, in the chalets whose low, square shapes dotted the moonlit hill-

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sides. At long intervals, breaths of the cool night wind came floating down from the distant snowfields, and the Arve waters tumbled down the valley with soft far-off murmur. Pamela came out on to the Brevent path and went on slowly upwards, indifferent where she went, so that Anstruther was not with her, and that the solemn peace of the mountain valley grew silent and yet more silent as she moved upwards.

A square, upright figure, with the evening dress which marks the Englishman in such holiday resorts, was moving down the path; it stopped opposite to her, a cigar dropped from its hand, and Seaford's voice broke the silence with a hoarse exclamation. The man and girl stood there peering at one another in the moonlight while one might count ten; then, with a passionate exclamation of anger, the Marquis moved on down the path. A curious, haunting sensation which had been with Pamela for some weeks past, that everything she did was "for the last time," came overwhelmingly to her now, and she cried out despairingly to the retreating figure. "Come back to me, Seaford! Speak to me just once more."

"What do you want out of me now?" The Marquis had hesitated for a moment, and returned a few steps, and now stood over the girl with quivering, threatening face. She looked up at him and saw his eyes alight with rage and

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contempt in the moonlight; and turned her own face away to hide its white misery.

"I want nothing," she said in a whisper. The words sounded like the very spirit of hopelessness, murmuring its confession that there was nothing now in all the cycle of worlds to ask for or live for or die for.

"Then why did you call me back? I did not want to meet you. I did not come out here to meet you. I came to this place to-day to see if what I had been told was true. This afternoon I saw for myself that it was true. To-morrow I am going home, and do not want to speak to you again. Why have you called me back now?"

"I—I—have been dreadfully punished. I—I—thought you would like to know."

"God above us, girl! What should I care! You deserve it, I suppose!"

"I? . . . Yes, I suppose so."

"You've my lad's death to answer for, and a wreck of my life, and Norman Stanier's, and God only knows whose besides. Would you escape scot free yourself? Women of your sort do escape like that pretty often, but not always, thank Heaven."

"No. . . I have not escaped."

"I didn't mean you to. I don't choose that you should. Do you want anything more of me before I go?"

"Oh, no, no. Good-night . . . and good-

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bye. Say good-bye to me a little kindly for the last time."

Seaford moved a step nearer to the figure whose hands were held out to him appealingly; it looked childishly young and sorrowful with its gathering tears and quivering lips, and the man was almost mad with love and longing as he put out one of his hands and almost touched one of those others which were so near to him. Then suddenly he turned away again, muttering savagely: "You killed my boy! He was worth a thousand of you, and you killed him!"

"I wish I had died too! Oh, I wish to God I had died too!"

"Why didn't you marry him?"

"I told him why."

"He was ruined, but you had money enough for both."

"That wasn't the reason." Pamela's voice was only audible because all nature seemed to be holding its breath to listen.

"You fancied yourself in love with somebody else, perhaps. I wonder if you were ever really in love with anyone except yourself?"

"Not in those days perhaps."

"Merciful Heaven, do you mean that you are now . . . with this wretched, swindling horse-coper who is here with you! You're engaged to him, I know. For some reason of your own, you may be going to marry him."

"Yes, I am going to marry him. The date

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and everything else is to be announced in the papers at once. They have fixed September 14th."

"They . . . ?"

"Granny and Sir Francis."

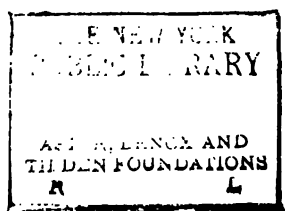
The Marquis leant back against a railing. The scorn and anger went out of his face, and there came there, instead, a look which Pamela had never seen before, the look of a strong man fighting a losing fight with fate, the look of a man who wants to win for a friend's sake, and is forgetting his anger at defeat in whole-hearted pity for the friend. In truth, for a moment, Seaford had forgotten his own desires—the tortured horror in the girl's face appalled him. He had no power of reading deep down into men's and women's hearts, but here was a young soul lying bare and open under his eyes, writhing helplessly under the brutal, iron hammer of fate and retribution. It was no butterfly being crushed on a wheel, but a strong young atom of very human humanity, full of nerves and emotions and sensibility, lying helpless under merciless, prolonged, horrible revenge. He could not bear to look at it; the pain of it was too frightful; the victim was new to it and would not understand how to get back, and struggle up again after each blow, and appeal for pity, and deaden some of the pain by cries of rage and protest.

There was a long silence, so prolonged that Pamela stole an uneasy glance at her companion



The Marquis watched Pamela moving on up the Brevent path





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and then moved a step or two forward as if she would go on with her walk. Seaford did not mean to speak to her any more, she supposed, and the pain and love in her soul were making her feel humble and a coward. She did not know what to do next in this new life where people disliked her, and cared nothing for her wishes, and even liked to hurt her. Once or twice lately, for brief, wondering moments, she had thought to herself that perhaps long ago other people in her world, in that dear London summer world which seemed such miles and years away, had been unhappy, and had wanted sympathy and kindly thought and help, maybe even from herself. Had she answered them as men and women were answering her now? Had she stood by, with indifferent, half-amused eyes, while some agonised soul, floundering in a lake of fire such as this, cried out for water? As she turned away from Seaford now, the thought came back again to Pamela's mind with trebled intensity that so some friend may have come to her, asking mutely for help, and turned away from the cold rock of selfishness which he or she had mistaken for a friend. Was this her punishment? . . . No, punishment ended in time, and this would not end.

Seaford watched the girl moving on up the Brevent path till she was almost out of sight. What was he to do? The marriage was impossible and yet . . . he would not forgive.

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"You are a fool, Lord Seaford, and not a particularly good-natured one either."

The Marquis turned with a great start, and found Cora Acland standing by his side. He stared at her with a sudden thrill of real, physical fear, perhaps the first he had ever felt in his life. It was a night of new emotions to my Lord Marquis.

"I'm not a ghost, you know," went on Miss Acland calmly, "and my appearance here isn't even a startling accident. I have come on purpose, knowing that I should find you here, and guessing pretty well what would happen between you and Miss Carstone."

"Have you spoken to her?" asked the man, staring at the woman in bewilderment, with a vexed, unfamiliar feeling that the management of his affairs was being taken out of his hands.

"No, I have come here to speak to you; to you, and afterwards if you talk sense, to one other man. Then I am going home to tell Marjorie Ellis that I have at least done my best to obey her wishes."

"And what may those be?" the Marquis asked, trying an ironical smile in the hope of hiding his nervousness.

"Never mind for the moment. I have something else to say before I tell you. You have been talking a great deal of nonsense about Whitmore and Miss Carstone . . . Oh, it's no good looking at me like that; you can't knock

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me down, and it is no good going away, because I should merely walk with you. Better stay and talk quietly. Will you tell me, did you seriously propose that Miss Carstone should marry Whitmore?"

"Yes, I did . . . How dare you talk to me in this fashion?"

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You and everyone concerned with such a scandalous idea ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourselves. It has struck me sometimes that there were only two sane people of my acquaintance playing about in London last summer, myself and Miss Carstone. I don't want to say a needless unkind word about the wretched boy who died at my house last month; you know as much about him as I do, and if you had succeeded in bringing about the marriage, you would have deserved what you would have got—a raging cataract of scandals and 'scenes' from women and money-lenders who would have torn your eyes out and made you bankrupt. And this in order to please an unhappy youth who lied to you and gulled you every week of his life; or partly for that and partly to carry out your silly boast that you would reform him! Reform him! You might as well take a handful of sand and boast that you would re-form it into a piece of rock!"

"It would have been quite easy," said the Marquis uncomfortably, "if it had not been for

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you and the other she-devils who got hold of him."

"And to help this highly improbable reformation you would have sacrificed a girl who is head over ears in love with you!"

My Lord's face turned white in the moonlight, and only a vague mutter of rage came from his lips. Cora, listening intently, caught a reference to Anstruther.

"It is an interesting engagement, I allow, but it won't last longer than you wish it to. I know enough about Francis Anstruther to send him flying from here the moment there is any object in his going. I myself should never have allowed Whitmore to marry Miss Carstone; if you want to prevent this man from marrying her, I am quite at your service. I'll clear him out of the village by the first diligence to-morrow morning. The job won't take me five minutes."

"For Heaven's sake, go and do it, then. But I am going away to-morrow morning, too."

The woman studied him coldly and carefully for a few moments. "I think, if you do, you will come back pretty soon afterwards," she said.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

**I** HAVE sent Pamela upstairs to find Biddy and talk to her." Lady Carstone had driven over to Beddowes from the neighbouring cottage which she had taken for three months, and was now greeting Lady Arlington with nervous glances and doubtfully outstretched hand. Nowadays, her Ladyship was wont to explain pathetically, she never knew whether a person was her own enemy, or only Pamela's. "I wanted to speak to you alone. You know Sir Francis Anstruther?"

"No, I do not," was the curt reply.

"Oh, yes, remember, please; every time we have met him it has been at one of your houses."

"I do my best to forget the fact."

"One would." Lady Carstone's eyes were unpleasant to look at. "However, the fact remains that we met him here, that he is engaged to Pamela, that he left us in August, having settled a wedding day in September, and that he has been writing, once a fortnight or so, ever since to put matters off."

"The letters must be a great relief to Pamela!"

"It is not an ideal match," answered the other drily, "but Pamela is anxious for the wedding,

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and as you know I pretend to no control over her. Now he writes a final letter saying that the marriage must be put off till next spring."

"Again, I congratulate Pamela."

"Someone's else hand is at work here, and I can't make out whose it is."

Lady Arlington laughed.

"It isn't mine, I assure you!"

"Perhaps," asked the other, with her eyes carefully fixed on a distant footstool, "it is Lord Seaford's?"

The hostess's face flushed, and she looked out of the window in silence for several moments.

"I hardly know," she said at last in a very low voice, "whether I am right or wise in talking to you about the matter, but Harry Seaford has been a dear, dear friend of mine for the best part of half a century now, and . . . and I have never loved to see him unhappy. He is painfully unhappy now; all his days everywhere are long, dull emptiness to him; he cares for no racing, hunting, friends, pleasure of any description; he will hardly speak to anybody from morning till night; and I—I—cannot bear to see him like this."

"How can I help all that?" asked the other, with a surly glance at the speaker's quivering face and nervously moving hands.

"You could show him that letter," Lady Arlington said quietly.

Lady Carstone glanced curiously at her com-

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panion. The reluctantly spoken words seemed to contradict the previous appealing tones; and both seemed to hint at a story which the visitor had suspected once or twice before.

"I will send him the letter, if you like," she answered, dropping her eyes again.

"Why not give it to him this afternoon?"

"This afternoon . . . ?"

"He is here. I thought you knew."

A tempest of emotions swept across Lady Carstone's face. She half rose from her seat, sat down again, started up again in real alarm. "I think I had better take Pamela away," she muttered. "May I go and find her?"

"Seaford is out of doors somewhere. Come and find him first!"

"On my word, I really dare not interfere any more; or rather, as you know, I never have interfered in Pamela's love affairs, and I must not and will not begin now."

"Come with me," said Lady Arlington almost peremptorily. "I think you would hardly know him again, if you met him alone. I do not approve of interference, either, in such affairs as a rule, but I cannot see Harry suffer like this any longer."

"Pamela has been scaring me, too, lately. She actually meant to ask you this afternoon if you would have her here for a few days, because she thought I was getting depressed at the sight of her, and had better have two or three friends of



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my own to stay with me! Of course she mustn't come if the Marquis is here."

"Or do you think she knew he was here?" asked the other drily. At which Lady Carstone moved her shoulders, with a slight gesture of impatience, and walked on in silence. For some odd reason the remark vexed her a little. Everyone attacked Pamela nowadays, at every point, on every occasion. Really, it wasn't quite fair. The girl had become—Lady Carstone did not quite understand what—different in some way or other, now. Once or twice, to her own astonishment and bewilderment, the elder lady had found herself wondering whether she could help Pamela, in any way, in her present trouble. Each time that a letter had come from Anstruther suggesting further postponement, and Pamela had brought it with dismayed apologies to her grandmother, Lady Carstone had assured her kindly and almost eagerly that there was no hurry. This morning, on receipt of the latest letter, they had had quite a friendly conversation about it.

Across the lawns, and down a long garden path, the two women moved now almost in silence. The November afternoon was so still that they could hear the sound of falling leaves rustling down to the ground, or the quick flight of a bird from tree to tree. And at last the murmur of voices came distinctly from the far-off rose garden. The women came to it, and stood by the ivy-covered archway leading to it, through

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which the tall, bare rose-trees only half hid two other figures who were standing there. Lady Arlington put a hand on her companion's arm to hold her back, for, as they stood there together, she saw the Marquis take Pamela's hands and bend down and kiss her lips.

"I really don't think, after all," said her Ladyship, "that any interference of ours will be necessary."



THE END



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1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

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